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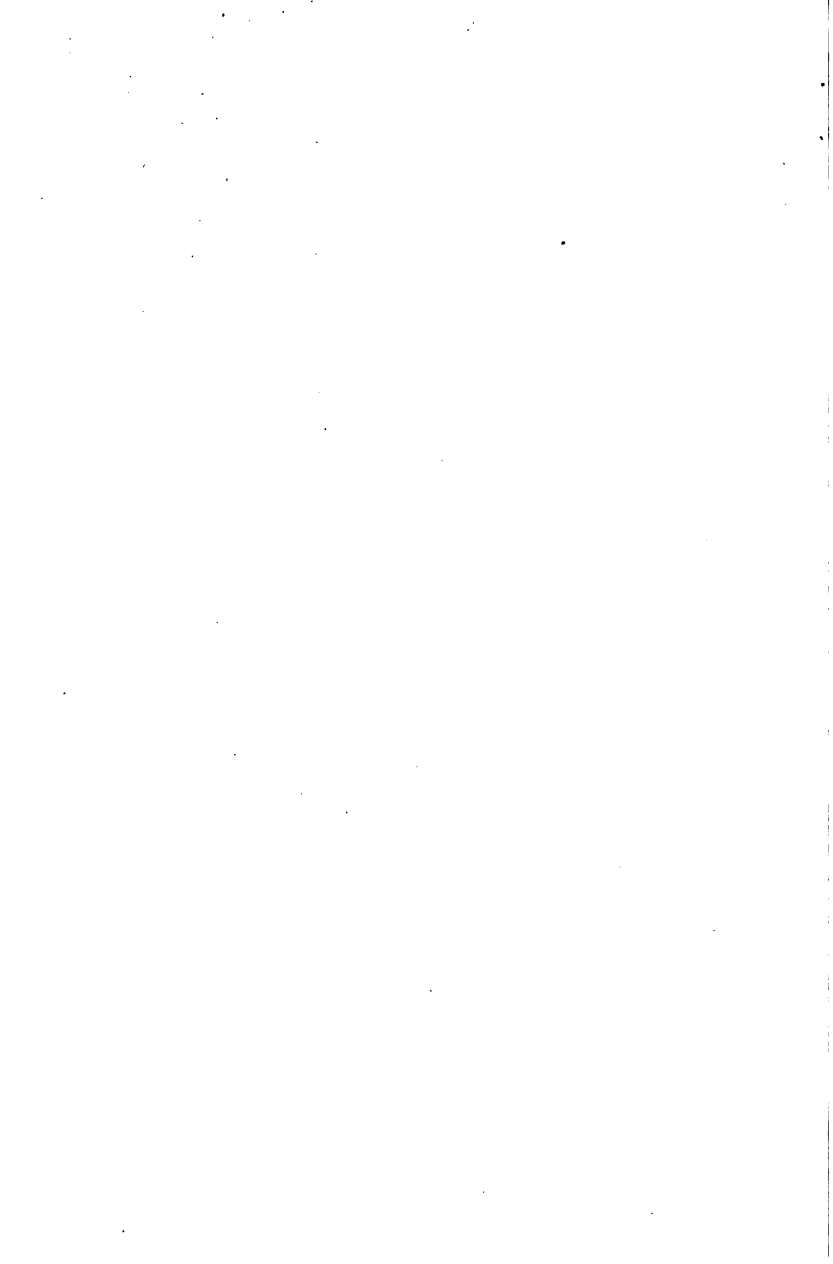
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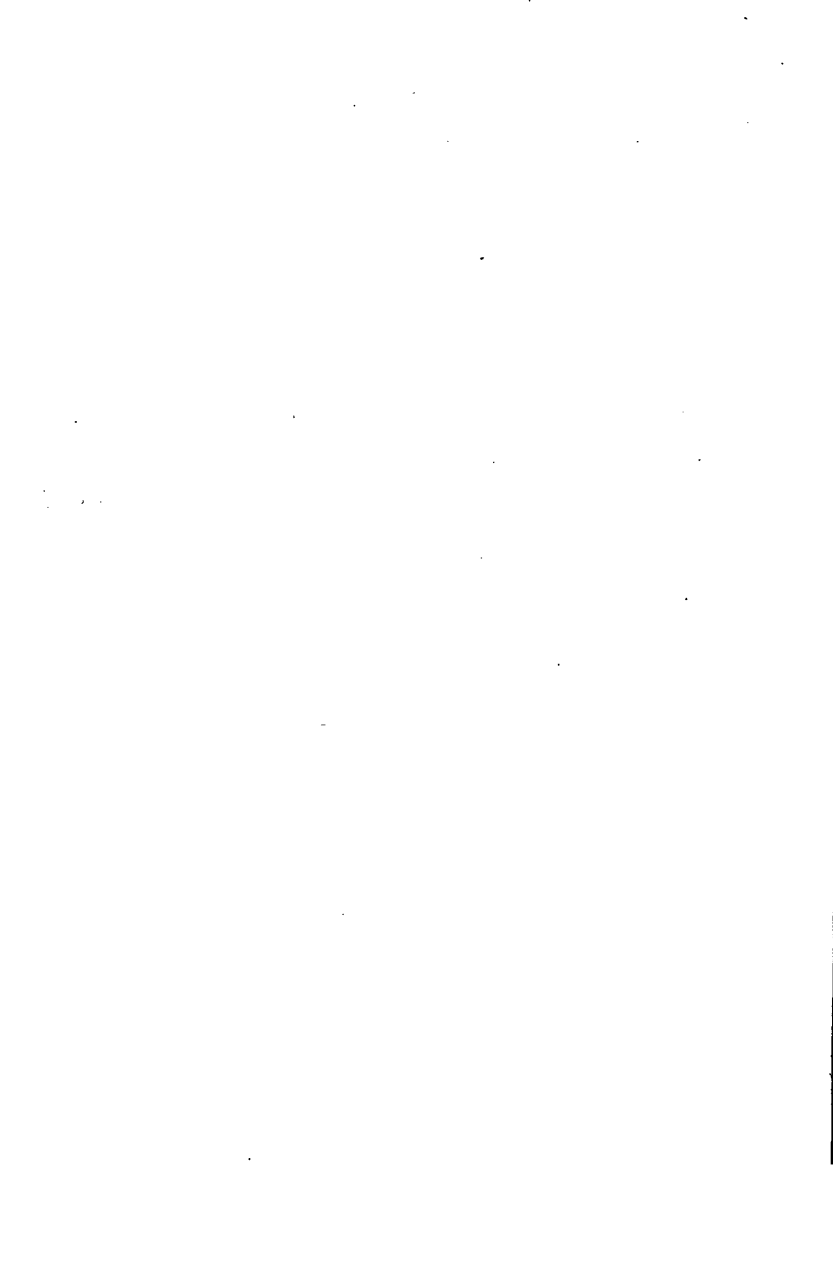
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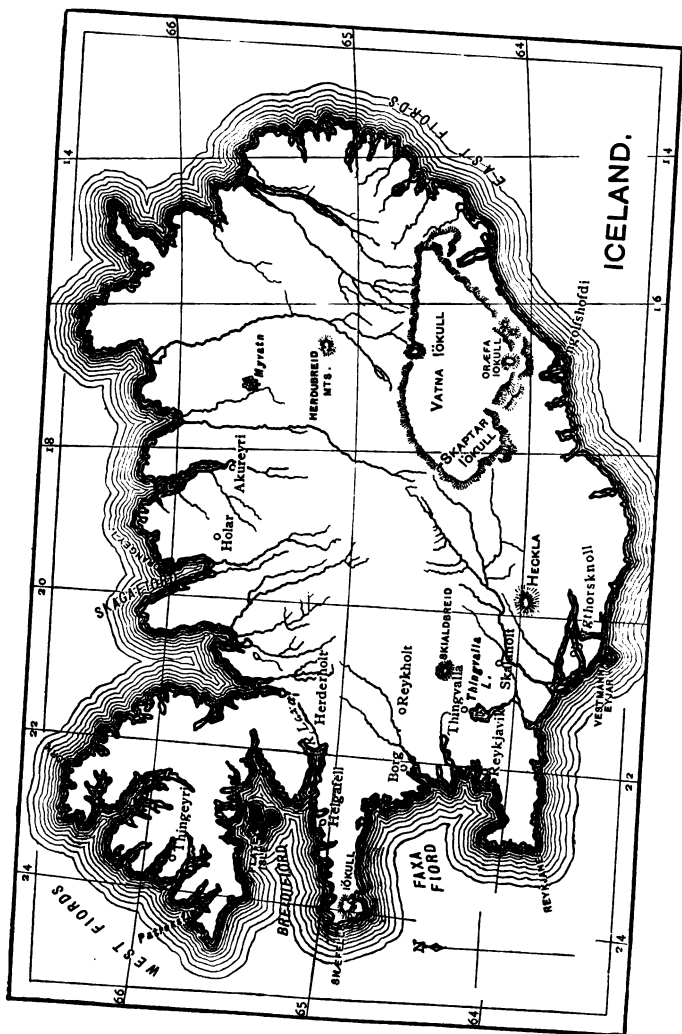
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# THE STORY OF I C E L A N D

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“



*“‘Thou bearest that look beneath the brows as  
though thou wert no coward,’ they said.”*

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## P R E F A C E

It is earnestly hoped that the readers of this little book will feel that they "deal not with the dead." To bring home to them as far as possible the life of this past, stories and quotations from Icelandic books have been frequently given, and in most cases in the exact words of the translators. Sometimes, however, the tales have been abridged or simplified because this short history is chiefly written for children. The names of the writers to whom I am thus indebted will be found in the second index at the end of the book.

The picture on page 168 is of an Icelandic carved chest which is in the possession of Dr. Vigfússon, from whom I have received much kind help, and by whose permission it was photographed for this book.

Jan., 47  
The order is purchase



The other pictures were lent by the authorities at the South Kensington Museum from their Danish and Scandinavian Art Handbooks.

I have much pleasure in acknowledging the kindness of another eminent Icelandic scholar, Mr. F. York Powell, to whose criticism my ms. and proofs were submitted.

L. M. M.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE IRISH MONKS.

ICELAND is the ragged-edged island that lies to the north-west of Europe, with the waters of the Atlantic Ocean rolling round it. It looks very lonely on the map, with ice-bound Greenland for its nearest neighbour. It is nearer the New World than the Old, to which it belongs.

Long ago the Icelandic volcanoes were hidden under the sea, but they burst so often that they began at last to appear above the waves, and to spread their lava and cinders round them. Again and again, lava and mud and cinders were boiled up and added to that first layer, till at last an island was made. Nobody called it "Iceland" then; nobody knew it was there. Geologists tell us that the island was formed "recently;" but then they count their time by centuries, because the life of stones and rocks is so slow of change, and even volcanoes take a long time to grow tall. So we know that the new island must have lain many years with only birds

to live upon it, whilst the wind, and the sea, and the sunshine were making it ready for men.

The first men to find it were some Irish monks. This was in the early part of the ninth century. Ireland was much more civilised then than England or Scotland. St. Patrick had preached Christianity in his country, and in a time of freedom from fighting which followed, learning and the arts of peace became so widespread throughout the land that students from Continental countries came to learn in the Irish schools.

But upon all this peace and prosperity there came the scourge of war, and Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish sea-rovers in their ships; and soon in France, Germany, and England they were praying in the Litany on Sundays, "From the ravages of the Northman, good Lord deliver us!"

It is not to be wondered, then, that Irish monks should set sail and seek a new country where they might be by themselves, right away from the fear of war and robbery. About fifty of them, sailing so, found Iceland. They stayed there some years, until the island was discovered for the second time by Northmen. Then the poor monks took to the sea again and went home; they would not stay with "the Pagans."

So Iceland was used first of all as a quiet place for saying prayers in. The Northmen used to come

across traces of those monks, finding some few things they had left behind them, such as a book, a bell, or a cross.

An Irish monk wrote down an account of the island in a book which he made "about the geography of the world." He had met some of the monks after their return to Ireland, and they had told him that in the island where they had been it was light all through the nights in summer-time, and that ice was to be found on the sea a day's sail to the north of it.

Now in Iceland it is the case that the summer is like a long day, so that people can work there, if they choose, "by the rays of the midnight sun." And there is much ice on the sea to the north of the island: white bears sometimes float there all the way from Greenland on an iceberg—a distance of two hundred and fifty miles.

Iceland has been called "the battlefield of frost and fire," and this name especially fits the high central part of the island, which is uninhabitable—a desert of grim mountain ridges and chasms, of stony valleys and dreary stretches of sand and lava, with great fields of ice spread out between the hills. It is as if frost and fire had fought there like two strong giants, equally matched, and the ground is seamed and scarred with the marks of the strife. Their work is so mingled that "often the snow is

blackened with ashes, and the ashes are whitewashed with snow."

We get the best idea of it from the names of the paths—such names as "Neck-or-nothing-way," "Head-brink-slope," "Break-neck-way" or "No-thoroughfare-way." There are no *roads* in Iceland, and these paths or bridle-tracks are made by taking the stones away, not by putting them down, as in England. Almost every Icelandic mountain is or was a volcano—either a sleeping or a dead one. They belong to the fire giant, but the frost giant covers them up with ice and snow. The bursting or eruption of a volcano is a terrible thing in any land: burning mud and lava flow down the mountain-side; smoke and darkness make the day like night; and when at length the air is clear, and the flames cease to rage, every green thing has been burned up for miles round, houses, horses and cattle have been destroyed, even if their owners escape, and there is widespread desolation.

But in Iceland the terrors of such an outbreak are doubled, for the flames and the streaming lava melt the ice and snow which lie on the mountains, and send floods down into the plains, which either destroy the pastures or swamp the villages. It is no wonder that volcanoes have been called "the air-holes of hell." One such flood, the result of an eruption in 1660, destroyed a whole village, and

carried away the church, which, being of wood, was seen to swim among the ice-masses, away into the sea, before it fell to pieces.

The largest ice-field is that called Vatna Iökull (waters-glacier), which stretches for many miles. Out of this rises Oraefa Iökull, close to the sea, the highest mountain in Iceland, and a volcano. It looks so desolate and awful, that they call it "the ice-mountain of solitude." To the south-west of the Vatna Iökull is Skaptar Iökull, one of the most terrible of Icelandic volcanoes.

To the north of the Vatna Iökull is the Herdubreid or broad-shouldered mountain, and near it the Herdubreid lake. One English traveller with some Icelanders crossed the Vatna Iökull and reached Herdubreid on the north. He speaks of the Vatna Iökull as "one lifeless, pathless wilderness of snow," and says, "Our footsteps gave no sound, and our very voices seemed strange in this drear solitude, the death-like stillness of whose snowy wastes is broken only by the howling of a storm or the outbreak of a volcano."

Mount Hecla, or "the cloak mountain," is so called because it is generally hidden in vapour. It is better known than the other volcanoes, partly because it breaks out very often—there are as many as eighteen eruptions recorded of Mount Hecla—and partly because it can be seen by ships sailing to Greenland and North America.



There is one mountain which sailors coming towards Iceland can always see from their ships, while they are still a long way from shore. It almost forms an island, and is cone-shaped, rising solemnly, straight out of the sea, to its great height, and shining with snow. It can also be seen distinctly from Reykiavik, the capital of Iceland, and in its crevices live hundreds of birds. It is called *Snaefells* or "Snowfell" *Iökull*. ("*Iökull*" means ice-mountain.)

There are Icelandic volcanoes hidden under seas also, and in the year 1783 a small island appeared to the south-east of the Cape of Reykanes. Iceland belonged to Denmark then, as now, and the Danish king at once claimed "New Island" as they called it. But the sea, being yet more greedy than the king, took back the island in a year's time, and it was swallowed by the waves and disappeared altogether.

The coast of Iceland is very ragged, except in the south, where it forms a curve or arc which is little broken. On the west coast there are two large bays or fiords—*Faxa-fiord* and *Breida-fiord*, or broad fiord, which is the deepest of Icelandic fiords. The north-west part of the island is very strangely shaped. You can make a rough picture of it for yourself, as the Icelanders do, by laying your right hand on the table, with the thumb stretched out.

*Snaefells Iökull* is at the thumb-nail; the wide

space between the thumb and the first finger is the Breida-fiord, which is full of small islands which cannot be counted, they are so numerous. They often look quite white with the sea-gulls that live on them. Eider-ducks are kept there. Each finger of your hand is a ragged piece of land, with the sea running up between, forming the west fiords or firths. Cape Horn is on the little finger.

The fiords in the north coast are all long, whilst those on the east are sharp and narrow, and almost enclosed by walls of rocks. In one of the latter lies the island of Papey, where the Irish monks must have landed, as it is called after them. The east coast is much rent, and is dreary and uninviting in its aspect.

Some of the dangerous gulfs round the coast are called by the French fishermen who come in spring-time "sailors' cemeteries," and they call the red and yellow twisted rocks "purgatory points."

There are several large lakes in Iceland, the chief ones being Thingvalla Lake, or Parliament-field Lake, which lies below a great plain, and Myvatn, or Midge-water, in the north.

There are many rivers, but their beds are so steep and their fall so rapid, that not even small boats can go upon them. It is dangerous for travellers to ride across some of these rivers on horseback unless they have a guide who is accustomed to the

quick flow of water, and knows the rocks and pits in the river-bed.

Some of the most wonderful things to be seen in Iceland are the hot springs or *geysers*, as they are called, from a word meaning "to gush." There are hot springs not far from Reykiavik. The largest of them, which is called the Great Geyser, throws jets of boiling water to the height of sixty or seventy feet in the air, out of a deep round pool. Two of the other springs are called the Great and Little "Strokkar," or Churns. The water is quite clear and pure, and is used for cooking and for washing clothes.

Travellers generally pitch their tents on the plain, and sometimes have to wait days and weeks before the springs gush. They cook their food in the wells out of which the water rises. So one traveller tells that he put a piece of mutton weighing six lbs. into the geyser, and tied it by a piece of string to the guide, who was left to watch it, and if the force of the boiling water threw it out, he could put it back again. It took twenty minutes to boil this traveller's dinner.

The gushing of a geyser is a very beautiful sight. Imagine a column of boiling water as high as a church spire, surrounded with clouds of steam and vapour, throwing out long streams of spray, that are blown about by the wind into all kinds of shapes, and gilded by the sunshine. Sometimes the geysers

throw pieces of stone and turf into the air, which have been placed in the wells beforehand. Some of them are called roaring geysers, because they make such a noise. These springs are in several parts of Iceland ; there are some at Reykholt, where they are used for baths.

There are no forests in Iceland, and trees seldom grow to any height, but are poor and stunted-looking : two trees that grew to an ordinary height in a garden were looked upon as great curiosities. When the monks and Northmen went to the island there were in many places low woods of birch and dwarf willows. As a proof of this, trunks and roots of trees are often dug out of the bogs.

The climate is not so cold as might be expected. The sea that flows round West Iceland is warmed by waters that come from South American lands that lie far away in the sunshine ; and these waters bring with them sweet-smelling trunks of trees, which drift to the shores. This drift-wood is dragged by horses from the shore, and every plank that is used in building churches and houses in the South of Iceland bears the marks of its long voyage in the tiny holes made by the sea-insects. But there are also cold waters from the North Polar regions, so that the temperature varies greatly in different parts of the island.

All kinds of things are thrown upon the beach as

well as wood—lava and Arctic shells, strange seaweeds, seeds from Jamaica, roots and scraps of bark ; fish-bones and dead puffins from the Arctic Ocean.

The air is clear, like that of Greece, and mountains can be seen from a distance of a hundred miles ; so travelling in Iceland is made wonderful by the different looks of things at different hours, seen through this clear air. The colour of the mountains seems always to be changing, sometimes they look blue as the sea, and sometimes they shine like gold.

Almost all the farms are built in the strip of country round the sea-coast, in the sheltered plains and valleys that lie between the rugged mountain ranges, where coarse grass grows for pasturage.

It is a strange country, and its people have to put up with bad weather, and hard fare, and poor lodging, but above all, with the constant dread of these snowy mountains, which look so still and unchangeable. In a book which was made by an Icelander about an Icelandic bishop, there is a description of the island given. It says that "this land which North Folk call 'Iceland' is well named ; for there is certainly plenty of ice both on sea and land. . . . There are mountains in this land which throw out terrible flames, with heavy showers of stones, so that one hears the noise and rattling din through the whole country, all the way from one

---

cape to another, a hundred and sixty-eight sea miles : at the same time this horror can be clothed in so great darkness by the wind, that in the height of summer one cannot see one's own hand at mid-day."

This story has been written to bring news to children of the people who have lived and died there, for they are such people as children love to hear about ; they have fought in fierce battles, and they have made beautiful tales, so that the name of their country is famous because of them.



SHIP ON A BRONZE KNIFE.

## CHAPTER II.

### “ TO NORWAY.”

ICELANDIC history is different from many other histories. There is no first chapter all about savages, who wore few clothes, and lived in huts, and fought with arrow-heads of stone.

The story of Iceland begins straight off with the words of an old song :—

“ To Norroway, to Norroway,  
To Norroway o’er the faem ! ”

It is chiefly written in books, although graves and buried things help to tell it too,—such things as swords, and cups, and ornaments ; but for a beginning the books send us straight, as the song says, “ To Norway over the sea.”

In the ninth century the men of Norway and

of Sweden made themselves famous throughout Europe. Many of them chose a roving life, sailing in their ships from land to land, adventuring for fortunes. There were Northmen in Sicily, Northmen in the Greek Emperor's body-guard; they helped to found the Russian Empire; they took possession of the north of France and called it "Normandy" after themselves, and by and by when they came to England, for the last time, with Duke William, we called their coming "the Norman Conquest."

But there was a king just then in Norway named Harold Fairhair, and whilst so many of the hardiest and best men were away from their country, he was able to extend his power so greatly, that the rovers got alarmed and came back, and then the great battle of *Hafrsfirth* took place, as the story says, "Now was the meeting with Harold the King in that firth which is called *Hafrsfirth*; and both sides had many men. This was the greatest battle that has ever been fought in Norway, and hereof most Sagas tell; . . . and thereto came folk from all the land, and many from other lands, and swarms of Vikings." But King Harold gained the day, and the sea-rovers were beaten, and forced to fly in their ships. They were fond of the sea, and had beautiful ships to sail in. These were of two kinds, long ships or war-ships for speed, and merchant ships or



ships of burden to carry food and timber. They were built high out of the water at each end, with a low place in between where there was room for thirty rowers. All the ships had a figure-head of one kind or another, a swan's head or a bison's, or the figure of a man. One, for instance, was called "The Vulture," having a vulture's head carved and painted at the prow. The Northmen were good mariners; they learned sailing across the sea by coasting voyages along the long lines of headlands and inlets of the Norwegian coast; they went to the north as far as the Arctic Sea for fur. They had no compasses, so they guided their ships by looking at the stars.

They were handsome and strong, as a rule, and the tales of their courage and endurance amaze us. They wore beautiful clothes, and lived at home in wooden halls, painted and carved, and hung with woven tapestry, where they met for banqueting after sea-roving and fighting. They were called *Wíkings*, from a word meaning "warrior," but in English they are generally called Vikings. Their names make us feel, more than anything, what they were really like when alive. One man was called *Fiddle-Mord*, because he had a sweet voice; another *Grim Goat-shoe*, because he was nimble-footed; another *Onund Tree-foot*, because he had a wooden leg. Then there was *Thorir Long-chin*, and *Thorgrim*

*Bottle-nose, Grettir the Strong, Ketil Flat-nose, Olaf the Halt, and Thorstein Gape-mouth.*

Their religion was an earlier one than that of Christ. They put their faith in many gods, of whom many tales are told. The gods were called Anses, and their home was in Ansgard. Among them were Thor, whom we call Thunder; Balder the Strong, and Hode, his blind brother, of whom you will hear in another chapter; Woden, the god of war, and of songs and poetry; Neord, the god of riches; and Loke, the enemy of gods and men. Woden had many names, and there were great tales of his wandering in search of wisdom, and how he got the draught of wisdom among the Giants, at the cost of his eye. He was the Father of the gods, the All-wise; he was the god of battles, and always carried a spear, so that his worshippers kept the sign of a spear-head (↑) sacred to him. He had two ravens which flew far and wide and brought him news of all things. The Norwegians worshipped good, kindly, boisterous Thunder, that slew the giants of Frost and Ice. The Swedes worshipped a god they called Lord or Frey, and prayed to him for good seasons. They also worshipped their dead ancestors and kings. Thor was very strong. He had a hammer called Miollne or Pounder, which was made for him and given to him by a dwarf, who said "that Thor could strike

as hard as he liked whatever was before him, and that the hammer should never break, and that if he cast it, then he should never miss; and that it would never fly so far that it would not come back to his hand, and that, if he liked, it would become so little that he could keep it in the bosom of his shirt, like a knife or a purse."

Thor did many a mighty deed with his hammer; but he lost it once, for it was stolen from him and given to the Giants.

"Wroth waxed Wing-Thor when he awoke and missed his hammer; he shook his beard and tossed his locks; the Son of Earth groped about him with his hands, and this was the first word that he spoke: 'Hearken now, O Loke, to what I am telling thee, a thing unheard of either in earth or in the heavens above: Thor has been robbed of his hammer!'

"They went to the fair Freya's bower, and this was the first word that he spoke: 'Wilt thou lend me thy feather-coat, Freya, that I may be able to find my hammer?' Quoth Freya: 'Yea, I would give it to thee though it were of gold, and grant it thee even though it were of silver.'

"Then away flew Loke, the feather-coat rattled, till he won out of Ansgard and won into Giant-land. Thrym, the Giants' lord, was sitting on an earthen grave mound plaiting golden leashes for his grey-

hounds, and trimming the manes of his horses; and this was the first word that he spoke: 'How goes it with the Anses? How goes it with the Elves? Why hast thou come alone into Giant-land?' Quoth Loke: 'It goes ill with the Anses! It goes ill with the Elves! Hast thou hidden the Thunderer's hammer?' Quoth Thrym, lord of Giants, 'Yea, I have hidden the Thunderer's hammer eight miles deep under the earth. No man shall ever get it back save he bring me Freya to wife.'

"Then away flew Loke—the feather-coat rattled—till he won out of Giant-land and won into Ansgard. Thor met him in the gate, and this was the first word that he spoke: 'Hast thou good news for thy toil? Tell me all thy tidings from the sky. . . .' Quoth Loke, 'I have good news for my toil. Thrym, the Giant-lord has thy hammer. No man shall ever get it back, save he bring him Freya to wife.'

"They went to the fair Freya's bower, and this was the first word that Thor spake: 'Take thy bride's veil, Freya; we two must drive to Giant-land.' Wroth waxed Freya, and snorted with rage; the hall of the Anses shook all over, the great Brising necklace snapped, and this was the first word that she spoke: 'Sure I were proved the man-maddest of women, should I drive with thee to Giant-land.'

"At once the Anses all went into counsel, and

all the goddesses into parley; the mighty gods took counsel together how they might get back the Thunderer's hammer.

"Then Heimdall spake, the whitest of the Anses; he had great foresight . . . : 'Let us wrap Thor in the bride's veil, let him have the great Brising necklace, let the bunch of keys rattle down from his girdle, and a woman's gown fall about his knees, and fasten the brooches set with stones upon his breast, and wind the hood neatly about his head.'

"Then up spake Thor, that doughty god: 'Surely the Anses would mock if I were to let myself be wrapped in a bride's veil!'

"Then up spake Loke: 'Speak not so, O Thor, for the Giants will soon dwell in Ansgard save thou get back thy hammer.'

"Then they wrapped Thor in the bride's veil, and gave him the great Brising necklace, let the keys rattle down from his girdle and the woman's gown fall about his knees, and fastened the stone-set brooches at his breast, and wound the hood neatly about his head.

"Then spake Loke: 'I will follow thee as bridesmaid; we two will drive to Giant-land.'

"The goats were fetched out at once; they were harnessed to the car-poles that they might run swiftly. The rocks were rent, the earth blazed in flame, as Woden's son drove into Giant-land.

“Up spake Thrym, the Giants’ lord : ‘Stand up, my guests all, and strew the benches ; they are bringing me Freya to wife. . . . There are here in the yard gold-horned kine, and black unspotted oxen, the delight of the Giant-lord. I have treasures in store, I have jewels in store, I lack nought but Freya.’

“Early in the evening the guests gathered, and ale was served to the Giants. Thor ate for his share a whole ox, eight salmon, all the dainties cooked for the ladies, and drank three casks of mead.

“Up spake Thrym, the Giant-lord : ‘Was ever a bride so sharply set ? I have never seen a bride take such big mouthfuls, nor a maid drink so deep of mead.’

“The quick-witted bridesmaid, sitting by, found ready answer to the Giant’s speech : ‘Freya has not eaten for eight days, so eager was she to be in Giant-land.’

“Thrym bent down under the veil, wishing to kiss the bride, but he started back the whole length of the hall. ‘Why are Freya’s eyes so awful ? it seems as if flames were darting from her eyes.’

“The quick-witted bridesmaid, sitting by, found ready answer to the Giant’s speech : ‘Freya has not slept for eight nights, so eager was she to be in Giant-land.’

“In came the Giant’s aged sister, begging boldly

for a bridal fee : ' Take the red rings off thine arm if thou wouldst win my love, my love and all my heart besides !'

" Up spake Thrym the Giant-lord : ' Bring in the hammer to hallow the bride ; lay the Pounder on the maid's lap. Hallow our hands together in wedlock !'

" The heart of the Thunderer laughed in his breast when he felt the hard hammer with his hands. First he slew Thrym, the Giant-lord, and then smote the whole race of Giants. He slew the Giant's aged sister who had begged a bridal fee of him ; she got a pound instead of pence, and hammer-strokes instead of rings.

" This is how Woden's son got back his hammer."

Many other delightful stories are told of the Thunder-god.

In or near the halls of most of the great noblemen or chiefs in Norway was the Hof or Temple. It was built like a large room, with a smaller one at the far end,—like the chancel of a church. Here stood the altar, whereon always burned holy fire. A ring, too, to swear by, lay upon it. There was a bowl to catch the blood of the sacrifices, and a bundle of twigs with which to sprinkle the people, and to divine by. Outside there stood a stone, on which the backs of the victims for sacrifice were broken ; this was called *the Stone of Fear*. Sometimes the victims were drowned in a pond ; they

were offered in different ways to different gods. Generally these victims were animals ; human sacrifices were seldom offered. When the people came together to worship, great fires were lit, and after the victims were slain, some of the flesh was boiled and a feast made. The people, when they had been sprinkled with the holy blood, and the lots had been cast to find out what would happen, sat round in the firelight and ate and drank.

The chief was also the priest, and he spoke aloud the toasts which were drunk to the gods for victory and strength, for peace and good seasons ; to the god of songs and to the lady of love ; and last of all a loving cup to the memory of dead friends.

Solemn oaths and vows were taken and uttered aloud, that such and such a brave deed should be done before next time, or vengeance taken for an ill one. Here are some lines from an old poem which have been put into English. Try to get them by heart, for they will help you greatly to understand what this Faith meant to the noblest and best of those who believed it,—to make the most of life, but constantly to remember that death would come, and yet not be afraid.

“ Cattle die, kindred die,  
We ourselves also die :  
But the fair fame never dies  
Of him who has earned it.



Cattle die, kindred die,  
We ourselves also die ;  
But I know one thing that never dies,—  
Judgment on each one dead.”

The poem from which these lines are taken is the oldest Northern poem which has come down to us. It gives the best picture of the Northmen of old days that we have. It is found in a calfskin book, copied by an Icclander. No one knows who wrote or collected the verses, but the book itself has come to be known as *The Older Edda*.

This poetry has come down to us in fragments, for much of it is lost and much of what remains is imperfect. But as we read it, we really feel as if we were listening to the old sage's voice, speaking words of wisdom.

It is the voice that spoke in the Vikings' ears many a time, and helped to make them what they were by reminding them of what their fathers had been for many generations. It tells about many things : about the friendly hospitality which should reign in halls ; about friendship, and the courage and wisdom a man needs in life. This is what it says :—

“Hail, mine host ! a guest is come. Where shall he sit ? . . . The new-comer with his cold knees needs a fire. A man that has travelled over

the hills needs meat and clothing. He that comes to a meal needs water, a towel, a welcome, good fellowship, and a hearing and kind answer if he can get it."

"A man that travels far needs his wits about him; anything will pass at home."

"No man can bear better baggage on his way than wisdom; in strange places it is better than wealth, it is the wretched man's comfort."

"It is a far way to an ill friend, even though he live on one's road; but to a good friend there is a short cut, even though he live far off."

"One has often to pay dear for (idle) words spoken to another."

"A fool thinks he knows everything if he sits snug in his little corner."

"A king's son should be silent and thoughtful, and daring in battle; cheery and blythe every one should be till his death-day come."

"A prisoner's heart is ever throbbing."

Another poem says—

"Never growl at a guest, nor drive him from thy gate. Be kind to the poor."

And men were taught to deal reverently with the dead as well as the living—

"Care thou for corpses, wheresoever on earth thou find them, be they sick-dead, or sea-dead, or weapon-dead. Make a bath for the departed man; wash his

hands and head ; comb him and dry him, ere he be put in coffin ; and bid him sleep sweetly."

And another poem says this—

"Courage is better than a good brand when the wroth meet in fray, for I have seen a brave man win the day with a blunt sword. The brave man fares better than the coward in the game of war ; the cheery man fares better than the whiner, whatever betide him."

And lastly, here is a piece of a song giving the last words of two brave soldiers—

"We have fought a good fight, we stand on slaughtered men on the sword-sated slain, like eagles on their perch ; we have gotten a good report, though we die to-day or to-morrow. No man can live over the evening when the word of the Fates has gone forth."

Dead men were buried under huge mounds or cairns, just as they were buried in many other countries,—there are green mounds found in English fields which hold dead men's bones. All kinds of things were put in the grave beside the dead,—weapons and drinking-cups, a favourite horse or dog, and even a ship. So we read in a story that "all went together to throw up the grave-mound of earth and lay Thorgrim in his ship." There is a pretty story told about Thorgrim's grave, for "a thing happened which seemed strange and new. No snow lodged on the

south side of Thorgrim's grave, nor did it freeze there ; and men guessed it was because Thorgrim had been so dear to Frey, for his worship's sake, that the god would not suffer the frost to come between them."

They believed in old days that the spirits of the dead lived in the green mounds and haunted them ; so one of the Northmen, when dying, said to his son, " Now would I be laid in my mound over against King Bele's mound, down by the sea, on this side the firth, whereas it may be easiest for us to cry out each to each of tidings drawing nigh." King Bele was his old, true friend, who died a little time before him.

The mounds of the dead were held very holy ; and it was thought that the dead were happy there, for sometimes, at nights, the graves opened, and those within were seen feasting, with merry faces.

This was the old faith of the Northmen ; but later, when they learned something of Christianity, they came to believe in a heaven and a hell. Their hell was a cold dreary place, where cowardly people went who died in bed. Their heaven was a place for happy warriors who had fought bravely and died in battle. There was to be feasting and fighting all day in Walhall. When a man died, his friends used to bury his sword with him, in case he should need it again, and they used also to bind shoes on his feet, with which to walk in to Walhall.

Long ago the Scotch people lit the candles and sang a song over their dead friends. They thought a little differently about the shoes, as you will see if you read some verses of the song :—

“ This ae night, this ae night,  
Every night and all :  
Fire and sleet and candle light  
And Christ receive thy saul (soul)  
When thou from hence away art past,  
Every night and all,  
To whinny muir thou com'st at last,  
And Christ receive thy saul.”

(A “ whinny muir ” is a moor with gorse growing on it. “ Whin ” is the Scotch for gorse.)

“ If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon (hose and shoes)  
Every night and all,  
Sit thee down and put them on,  
And Christ receive thy saul.  
If hosen and shoon thou ne'er gav'st nane,  
Every night and all,  
The whinnes shall prick thee to the bare bane,  
And Christ receive thy saul.”

## CHAPTER III.

### THE DOOM OF BALDER.

THERE was another book which Snorri and some other writers of the thirteenth century made, to help young poets to make poetry, and in this are many bits of old poetry and some beautiful stories which Snorri got out of the old poetry. This book seventeenth-century scholars called *The Younger Edda*.

No one is quite sure of the meaning of "Edda;" very likely it is from "Erda," old mother Earth. Those poems give the thoughts and faith of men in the lands of the north, Goths, and Swedes, and Danes, and Northmen, in the days of their sea-roving, and of their going away from their own homes to settle in the richer western lands.

One of the old poems is about Balder—"Balder among the gods, whom all the powers mourned for;" but the beginning of the story is in an old lay called "Balder's Doom," which tells how Woden rode to hell.

"At once the Anses all went into counsel, and all the goddesses to parley. The mighty gods took counsel together that they might find out why dreams of evil haunted Balder. . . .

"Then Woden arose, the ancient sire, and laid the saddle upon Sleipnir's back. (Sleipnir was Woden's horse.) Away he rode down toward Mist-Hell's abode, and there met him a whelp or hell-hound coming out of a cave: there was blood on its breast, as it ran by the way, baying at the Father of spells. On Woden rode, while the vault rang, till he came to the lofty hall of Hell. Then Woden rode to its eastern gate, where he knew the grave of the Wise Woman or Sibyl stood. He fell to chanting the mighty spells that move the dead, till she rose, all unwilling, and her corpse spake:—

"*Sibyl.* 'What mortal is it, whom I know not, that hath put me to this weary journey? I have been snowed on with the snow, I have been beaten with the rain, I have been drenched with the dew, long have I been dead.'

"*Woden.* 'Way-wise is my name; I am the son of War-wise. Tell me the tidings of hell, and I will tell thee the tidings of earth. For whom are the benches strewn with mail-coats, and the hall so fairly hung with painted shields?'

"*Sibyl.* 'For Balder the mead stands ready brewed,

the walls decked with shields, while the sons of the Anses are in merry mood. All unwilling have I spoken; I will speak no more.'

"*Woden*. 'Speak on, O Sibyl; I must inquire of thee till I know all. Next must I know who shall be the death of Balder, and take the life of Woden's son?'

"*Sibyl*. 'Lo, Hode is bearing a branch of fate. He shall be the death of Balder, and take the life of Woden's son. All unwilling have I spoken; I will speak no more.'"

But now we come to the story that Snorri tells, out of a part of the poem that is lost.

"Balder the Good dreamt dreams great and perilous for his life: but he told the Anses the dreams. Then they took counsel together, and this was done: they pray peace for Balder against all kinds of harm; and Friggia took an oath that they should spare Balder from fire and water, iron, and all manner of metal, stones, earth, trees, sicknesses, beasts, birds, and vipers.

"But when this was known and done, then it was the pastime of Balder and the Anses that he should stand up in their meetings, and that of all the rest some should shoot at him, some hew at him, some smite him with stones. But whatever was done to him, he took no hurt, and all thought this great gain. But when Loke saw this, it disliked him



much that Balder took no hurt. He went to Friggia, and turned himself into a woman's likeness; and then Friggia asked of that woman, 'Did she know what the Anses did at their meeting?'

"She said that all shot at Balder, and he took no hurt.

"Then said Friggia: 'No weapon or tree' may hurt Balder: I have taken an oath of all of them.'

"Then asked the woman: 'Have all things sworn to spare Balder?'

"Then answered Friggia: 'There grows the sprout of a tree east of Walhall—mistletoe it is called; methought it was too young to require an oath of.'

"Then the woman went away, but Loke took the mistletoe and cut it off and went to the meeting.

"Now Hode stood without the ring of men, for he was blind.

"Then said Loke to him: 'Why shootest thou not at Balder?'

"He answered: 'Because I cannot see where Balder is, and am weaponless to boot.'

"Then said Loke: 'Do thou like other men, and show Balder homage as do other men; I will show thee whereabouts he stands—shoot at him with this wand.'

"Hode took the mistletoe, and shot at Balder as Loke guided him. The shaft sped right through him, and he fell dead to earth, and that is the greatest

mishap that ever befell gods and men. . . . When Balder had fallen, then speech failed the Anses, and hands, too, to take hold of him : and they were all of one mind to him that had done the deed, but none might avenge it, so holy was the place. But when the Anses strove to speak, it was a wail that came first to their mouth, so that none might tell the others of his grief with words. But Woden bore this loss worst of all, for he best understood what a mighty loss and lack the Anses had in the death of Balder.

“But when the gods came to themselves, then spoke Friggia, and asked who there was among the Anses that would fain win for himself all her love and favour, if only he would ride on the road to hell and try to find Balder, and offer Hell ransom if she will let Balder come home to Ansgard.

“And he that is called Hermod the Brisk, son of Woden, was ready to take the journey. Then Sleipnir, Woden’s horse, was taken and led forth, and Hermod got up on that horse and galloped away.”

So were fulfilled the words of the Sibyl, which she had said at another time : “I behold Fate looming for Balder, Woden’s son, the bloody victim. There stands the mistletoe, slender and delicate, blooming high above the ground. Out of this shoot so tender to look upon there shall grow a harmful,

hateful shaft. Hode shall shoot it, but Friggia shall weep over the woe of Walhall."

But now the Anses took Balder's body and bore it down to the sea ; they laid it in his ship *Ringhorn*, which was the greatest of all ships. "The gods would fain launch her forth, and make Balder's bale-fire thereon ; but the ship would not go forwards. Then one was sent into Giant-land after the ogress called Hyrrockin ; and when she came, she rode on a wolf and had vipers for reins. Then she leapt off her steed, and Woden called for four Bare-sarks (wild warriors) to see to the steed, and they could not hold him till they had felled him. Then Hyrrockin went to the bow of the ship, and so shoved it forwards at the first touch that fire sprang out of the rollers, and all the land shook. Then was Thor wroth, and was for breaking her head forthwith, but that all the gods begged mercy for her.

"Then the body of Balder was borne out to the ship, and when his wife saw it her heart broke for grief, and she died ; she was borne to the pile and thrown on to the fire.

"Then Thor stood up and hallowed the pile with Pounder. But before his feet ran a certain dwarf, called Lit, but Thor spurned at him with his foot, and dashed him into the fire, and he was burned. . . . Woden laid on the pile the gold ring called

Draupnir or Dropper ; it had this virtue, that every ninth night there dropped from it eight gold rings of the same weight as itself."

There lived an Icelfander in the tenth century named Olaf Peacock, who had the roof of his hall carved and painted, showing the different stories of the gods. There was a poet named Wolf, who wrote about the gods going to Balder's burning on Olaf's roof, and he said : "First rides Frey, the king of men, on his boar with golden tusks, to the bale-fire of Balder, Woden's son. The goodly Heimdal rides his horse to this pile that the gods had cast up for the dead son of the wise friend of ravens (Woden). The wide-famed god of sooth-saying (Woden) rides to the huge wooden bale-fire of his son. I can see the Valkyries (Woden's fighting maids) and the ravens following the wise god of victory, the lord of the holy draught.—Thus within the roof is adorned with memories."

Meantime "of Hermod it is to be told that he rode nine nights through dark dales and deep, so that he saw nought till he came to the river Yell and rode over Yell bridge ; it is thatched with shining gold.

"Modgud is the name of the maid who keeps the bridge. She asked him his name and kin, and said that the day before there rode across the bridge nine bands of dead men ; 'but my bridge clangs not

save under thee only, and thou hast not a dead man's hue : why ridest thou here on the hell road ?'

"He answered : 'I shall ride to hell to look for Balder ; but hast thou seen aught of Balder on hell road ?'

"And she said that Balder had ridden thither over Yell bridge, 'but beneath and yonder lieth hell road.'

"Then rode Hermod thereon till he came to hell's grating. Then got he off his horse, and girthed him up fast ; got up and spurred him on, but the horse leaped so hard over the grating that he never came near it. Then Hermod rode up to the hall, and got down from his horse ; went into the hall, and saw there his brother Balder sitting in the high seat, and Hermod tarried there overnight. But at morning Hermod asked Hell that Balder should ride home with him, and so told him there was great wailing among the Anses. But Hell said it should now be tried whether Balder was so beloved as was said ; and she said, 'If all things in the world, quick or dead, weep for him, then he shall fare back to the Anses, but he shall be kept with Hell if any speak against him or will not weep.'

"Then stood Hermod up, and Balder led him out of the hall, and took the ring Dropper, and sent it for a keepsake to Woden, but Nanna (Balder's wife) sent Friggia a gown and gifts besides, and to Fulla

(Friggia's handmaid) her ring. Then Hermod rode back on his way and came to Ansgard, and told of all he had seen and heard.

"Next the Anses sent messengers over the whole world to pray that Balder might be wept out of hell. All did that—men and living things, and earth and stones, and trees and all metals. Thou must have seen that all these things weep, when they come out of frost into heat. When the messengers were going home, and had done their errand well, they found a certain cave, wherein sat a hag. Her name was Thauk. They pray her to weep Balder out of hell.

"She answered: 'Thauk will weep dry tears at Balder's bale-fire. What have I to do with the son of man, quick or dead? Let Hell keep what she holds.'

"But people thought that it was Loke that was there; he has wrought most ill among the Anses."



LADY'S COMB.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FINDING OF ICELAND.

AFTER the battle of Hافرſfirth the sea-rovers fled "west over the seas" to the islands now called Great Britain, the Orkney and Shetland isles; they went also to "the south isles," which were the Hebrides and islands south of them. They spent the spring and summer-time in sailing about, fighting and plundering, and rested in winter. But King Harold went after them and tried to crush them into obeying him. Then Iceland was found by them, and many of them settled there rather than submit to the rule of Harold.

The first to find the new volcano island was called Naddod, a man who had been in the British Islands.

His ship was cast ashore in a storm, and he named the island "Snowland."

Next to visit it was Gardar Swafarson, a Swede, who sailed round it, landed on the eastern shores, and spent the winter there. He named it Gardars-holm—that is, Gardar's island. When he got home he told his friends about it, and one of them named Floke made up his mind to visit the island.

Before setting sail Floke offered a great sacrifice, and dedicated three ravens to the gods. He took the birds to sea with him, and sailed to the Faroe Isles. Setting out thence for the new island, he freed his first raven, which flew high up into the air, and alighted on the ship again. He freed his second raven, and it flew back to the Faroe Isles. Then he sent out his third and last raven, and it flew away. He steered his ship after it, and after some time he reached Gardar's island, feeling sure the gods had guided him; and afterwards he was always called "Raven Floke."

He and his followers landed and settled, but they gave too much of their time to the fishing, which was plentiful, and did not get hay for the cattle they had brought with them, and so the cattle died. Then Floke and his people went home again, and he named the island "Iceland." But two of his companions said that in Iceland "butter dripped from every plant," which meant that they had seen un-



commonly rich land there. Some years after Floke's visit a company of Northmen came to Iceland and settled there. They came from Ireland, where they had been for some time. This was in King Alfred's days, and about this time the Christian hermits went back to Ireland. Chief among the settlers were two men, Ingolf Arnason and Heorlaf.

Ingolf made a great sacrifice the winter before he started for Iceland, but Heorlaf never sacrificed. Heorlaf was killed by his Irish slaves a year afterwards. They fled, and settled in the islands to the south of Iceland, which were called after them "Westmanna Eyjar," or west men's isles. "West men" meant Irishmen.

Most precious of all his possessions, Ingolf brought with him the pillars of his hall. These carved pillars stood in front of the high seat of the chief. They were held sacred in the household. When Ingolf came near the coast of Iceland he threw his house pillars overboard, and vowed that he would make his new home wherever they were cast ashore. They did not drift to shore for three years, or, anyhow, Ingolf did not find them till then. But he kept his vow, and made his house in that place. It is now Reykiavik, the capital of Iceland. The name means "bay of steam;" the *reykr*, or steam, or reek, comes from the hot springs near the town. It got its name from smoke, like

Edinburgh, whose pet name is "Auld Reekie"—"old smoky." But the place where Ingolf settled just before he found his pillars is on the coast, further east than Reykiavik, and is still called Ingolf's Head. One old Norwegian died on his way out to Iceland. Before he died, he told his son to put his body in a coffin and throw it overboard when the ship came near land, and settle wherever it was washed ashore. This was a still more solemn home-finding than Ingolf's way with house pillars.

Ten years later a second company of settlers came from Ireland with the Lady Aud the Deep-minded, widow of the King of Dublin. She was the daughter of Ketil Flat-nose, a sea-rover, and the granddaughter of a nobleman in Norway named Beorn, the Ungartered. When her husband and son died, she came out to Iceland in a ship which she had caused to be built, and she had twenty free men in her ship. Many men of gentle birth came with her to Iceland, who had been taken prisoners by her son or husband in war. Later there came a large company of settlers from the Western Isles. "Onund Tree-foot" was one of them, "the briskest and lithest of one-footed men who have ever lived in Iceland."

The number and power of these settlers from Keltic lands must be remembered. Amongst them were Irish and Scotch men and women of noble family—and slaves too; and it is from the mixture

of the two fine races, *Keltic* and *Scandinavian*, that the Icelanders sprang. For they are a people that have gifts of their own amongst northern races, as their history and literature prove.

Last of all there came more settlers from Norway, for Harold Fair-hair was sole king of Norway in those days, "and young he was when he got the kingdom. The wisest of all men was Harold, and well fitted of all prowess that befitted the kingly dignity. The king had a great Court, and chose therefor men of fame, even such as were best proven for hardihood and many doughty deeds; and whereas the king was fain to have with him the best men that might be chosen, so also were they held in more account than other men in the land, because the king was niggard to them neither of wealth nor furtherance if they knew how to bear themselves. Nor, on the other hand, did this thing go for little, that none of those who were against the king's will throve ever; for some were driven from the land and some slain; but the king stretched his hand out over all the wealth they left behind. But many men of account fled from Norway, and would not bear the burden of the king, even men of great kin; far rather would they forego the free lands their fathers owned, their kin, and their friends, than lie under the thraldom of the king and the hard days he laid upon them. These went from land to land, and in those days

was Iceland peopled, for many fled thither who might not abide the lordship of King Harold."

There is an old song made by a friend of King Harold's about his Court and his warriors. It is a spirit-lady in the song who asks questions, and a raven that answers her from the rocky peak over Bergen.

"The white-throated lady spake to the rover of the sky with the quick eyelids, as he sat on a peak of Wincrag :—

"How is it with you, ye ravens? Whence are ye come with gory beaks at the dawning of the day? . . . '

"The poll-feathered sworn-brother of the eagle shook himself, and wiped his beak, and thought over his answer.

"We have followed the young hero Harold, the son of Halfdan, ever since we left the egg. Surely, I thought, thou must know the king that dwells at Quin, the lord of the Northmen. He has many a deep keel, with reddened targets and red shields, tarred oars, and driven snow-white awnings. The eager prince would drink his yule at sea, and play Frey's game (war) if he had his will. From his youth up he loathed the fire-hearth and sitting indoors, the warm bower, the bolster full of down.'

"Quoth the lady : 'How does the generous prince deal with the men of feats of renown that guard his land?'

"Quoth the raven : 'They are well cared for, the

warriors that cast dice in Harold's Court. They are endowed with wealth and with fair swords, with the ore of the Huns (gold) and maids from the East. They are glad when they have hopes of a battle; they will leap up in hot haste and ply the oars, snapping the oar-thongs and cracking the tholes. Fiercely, I ween, do they churn the water with their oars at the king's bidding.'

"Quoth the lady: 'I will ask thee, for thou knowest the truth of all these things, of the meed of the poets, since thou must know clearly the state of the minstrels that live with Harold.'

"Quoth the raven: 'It is easily seen by their cheer and their gold rings that they are among the friends of the king. They have red cloaks, right fairly fringed, silver-mounted swords, and ring-woven sarks, gilt trappings, and graven helmets, wrist-fitting rings, the gifts of Harold.'

"Quoth the lady: 'I have not asked thee yet of the Players and Tumblers. What is the meed of Andad and his company at Harold's house?'

"Quoth the raven: 'Andad dandles his crop-eared dog, and plays the fool, making the king laugh.'" (Andad was the Court fool.)

Then the raven spoke of the battle of Hafrsfirth.

"Quoth the raven: 'Ships came from the west, ready for war, with grinning heads and carven beaks. They were laden with warriors, with white shields,

and with western spears, and Welsh swords. They tried their strength against the eager king, . . . and he taught them to flee. The king launched his ship when he looked for battle. . . . We ravens rejoiced at such a deed of fame.'"

It was said that people at last began to leave Norway for the west in such numbers that King Harold was forced to tax every emigrant, because too many of his subjects were leaving him.

The first thing the settlers did when they got to Iceland was to choose a place to live in. Then they "hallowed the land" by lighting fires all round the space they had chosen. These were also boundary fires, for there was a law in Norway that no man might take more land than he could measure off in a day by kindling fires round it. But a woman settler might not take more land than she could drive a young heifer round between sunrise and sunset on a spring day. The chiefs of each group of settlers built their halls and temples, and brought with them, as well as their pillars, the earth on which the altar was built at home.

The chief was named *Gode*—that is, a man that has to do with the gods. He was priest, ruler, and law-giver to his people. He used to summon meetings like those in Norway, where disputes were settled and laws made. Such meetings were called *Things*. We still keep the word in

our "meeting" or "mot-thing," and "husting" or "house-thing." There were Things held by the Northmen settlers in many northern countries, and the memory of them lingers in the names of the places where they happened, like *Ding-wall* in Scotland, *Ting-wall* in Dublin, in Shetland, *Tin-wall* in the Isle of Man, and *Scar-thing* in Nottingham.

As the settlers grew more in Iceland, there was less land for new-comers, and then there was quarrelling and fighting, for when followers quarrel chiefs do not always agree. If, as we know, a house divided against itself cannot stand, much less can a nation, which is larger. The wisest of the settlers knew this, and they said, "We must have law and peace in Iceland, and not revolt and misery." But it took time for law and order to grow strong, and even after they had been long established quarrels and bloodshed still went on. Some of these quarrels came about in the strangest ways. One was about a whale, as the story tells:—

"In those days befell such hard times in Iceland, that nought like them has been known there; well-nigh all gettings from the sea and all drifts came to an end; and this went on for many seasons. . . . That spring there came a great storm from the north, which lasted near a week, and after the storm men looked after their drifts. Now there was a man called Thorstein, who dwelt at Reekness; he

found a whale driven up on the firthward side of the Ness, at a place called Rib Skerries, and the whale was a big whale."

When Thorstein saw the whale he sent messages to all the farmers round about, and all the farmers that were able came to the whale. They took boats and rowed out to it, and began to *flinch* it or cut it up, and to send the pieces ashore as they cut.

At first there were only twenty men at work, but soon many more came. Then they all began to quarrel over the whale—first one and then another laying claim to it; and so a fight began, though "few men there had weapons, except the irons wherewith they were cutting up the whale, and some choppers."

Some of them were in boats, some of them on shore, and one man had cut a footing on the whale near the head, where he stood, so that he might cut away more of the whale. But as he stood one of the others "smote him on the neck and struck off his head."

As the fight got fiercer those who were unarmed caught up whatever they could get, and one man beat another to death with a whale-rib; and it was not until many were wounded and slain that the foes were parted, some rowing away in their boats, and some going home to their farms.

It was made law after this quarrel that every man might "have the drifts before his own lands."



## CHAPTER V.

### THE FREE STATE.

ICELANDERS owe much to a certain man named Ulfiot, who is to be remembered as the man that brought it about that there should be one law for all the island.

He was sixty years of age when he undertook a journey to Norway, and stayed there for three years, which time he devoted to the study of the making and keeping of laws. He then drew up such laws as he thought were best for Iceland, and came back there.

Meantime his half-brother, Grim Goat-shoe of the nimble feet, had also undertaken a heavy task. For he walked over the whole island to find a fitting place for the Al-thing, or yearly meeting of the whole people. It was not easy to find such a place. There must be room for hundreds of people, and space for their tents or huts, because the Althing would last for some days. There must be pasture for horses, fuel for fires, and water to drink. Goat-

shoe chose the one place in all Iceland that was just fit for such a great meeting. It is a great plain in the south-west of the island. It is a plain of lava, the scene of old volcanic terrors. They named it Thing-valla, or "Parliament Plain." There are two rocky gorges or rifts—"The Great Rift" and "The Raven Rift"—running across it. To the east is a green space where the horses used to feed, and further north rises a mountain which is called "Broad-shield." To the south lies a large shining lake—the Thingvalla Lake. From the western gorge there flows a little stream, which becomes a river, with an island in it, before it flows into the lake below. On the brink of the rift is a little height called "the rock of the law." On the island duels called "Holmgang" were fought. A duel is a fair fight between two persons, and was a lawful way of settling lawsuits then in Iceland. The lawsuits were about all sorts of things—the right to lands, the getting of a wife, the slaying of a brother or some other kinsman, or of a servant, or sometimes even the biting words of a mocking tongue.

The yearly gathering at Thingvalla began about the middle of June and lasted for a fortnight. But as the journeys there and back took so long, the people generally set aside six weeks, and called them "Parliament Weeks."

The Althing was a festival to the people ; it was

the centre of Icelandic life. They came from far-off farms on horseback, servants bringing food and all needful for the sixteen days' stay; masters in gay holiday clothes. In the south of the plain a row of huts or booths was built, the same people returning to the same booths year after year, so that they were named after their owners.

In the tale of *Grettir the Strong* we are told how he rode to the *Althing* for the first time when he was a boy. His father, *Asmund the Greyhaired*, was getting old. His friend *Thorkel* came to visit him, and they began to talk about the boys. "Asmund said that he thought *Atli* (the eldest) would be a great man at farming, foreseeing, and money-making. *Thorkel* answered: 'A useful man, and like unto thyself. But what dost thou say of *Grettir*?'"

"Asmund said: 'Of him I say that he will be a strong man and an unruly, and, certes, of wrathful mood, and heavy enough he has been to me.'

"*Thorkel* answered, 'That bodes no good, friend. But how shall we settle about our riding to the Thing next summer?'

"Asmund answered: 'I am growing heavy for wayfaring, and would fain sit at home?'

"'Wouldst thou that *Atli* go in thy stead?' said *Thorkel*.

"'I do not see how I could spare him,' says Asmund, 'because of the farm-work and ingather-

ing of household stores ; but now Grettir will not work, yet he bears about that wit with him that I deem he will know how to keep up the showing forth of the law for me through thy aid.'

'Well, thou shalt have thy will,' said Thorkel, and withal he rode home when he was ready, and Asmund let him go with good gifts.

"Some time after this Thorkel made him ready to ride to the Thing. He rode with sixty men, for all went with him who were in his rule : thus he came to Biarg, and therefrom rode Grettir with him."

There were all kinds of games and trials of strength at the Thing, and sometimes horse-fighting. It must have been like a country fair in England, on a large scale, for there were stalls, and buying and selling, and all kinds of merry-making. Women and children rode to the Thing also, and sometimes marriages were arranged then.

There was a man named Glum who asked for a wife at the Althing time. Her name was Hallgerda. "She had on a cloak of rich blue woof, and under it a scarlet kirtle, and a silver girdle round her waist, but her hair came down on both sides of her bosom, and she had turned the locks up under her girdle. She sat down between Hrut and her father, and she greeted them all with kind words, and spoke well and boldly, and asked what was the news. After that she ceased speaking.

“Then Glum said: ‘There has been some talk between thy father and my brother and myself about a bargain. It was that I might get thee, Hallgerda, if it be thy will, as it is theirs; and now, if thou art a brave woman, thou wilt say right out whether the match is at all to thy mind; but if thou hast anything in thy heart against this bargain with us, then we will not say anything more about it.’”

Hallgerda said “Yes” to the question which had been asked of her so nicely, and they were married when they got home.

It must have been a wonderful scene, this Althing, the place being so strange and beautiful, and the men with shining helmets and gaily painted shields; the horses with their bright trappings; the duels and the lawsuits and speeches, and the worship at the Thingvalla Temple (near the hill of the law)—all in summer-time, when the days are long in Iceland, and the plains are very green.

Here then, in the year 930, the first great meeting of the people took place, the first of many Althings; and at this time the laws were adopted which are called Ulfiot’s Constitution.

The island was divided into four parts, each part having three chief temples and three law-courts. The northern part was a little larger, so it had four chief temples and four law-courts. The three courts

of each quarter held two Things in the year, a spring and an autumn Thing. These were called quarter Things.

The spring Things lasted for about a week in the month of May. If disputes could not be settled at these, the matters were taken to the Althing, where men from all four quarters met.

The autumn Things met some time in July or August, about a fortnight after the Thing weeks were ended. They lasted for a day or two, and the proceedings of the Althing were published and explained to those who were at home.

The Norwegian laws allowed men to summon a Thing whenever it was necessary. So in one of the Sagas we read that when a man had been slain in a town in Norway "the Earl was wondrous wroth at this tale, and forthwith summoned a Thing in the town." Messengers were sent throughout the land bearing a token, by which people knew that their presence at a Thing was needed. In Iceland this would not have been easy, but well-nigh impossible, owing to the distance between the farms and villages, and the roughness of the ways.

Besides these chief meetings in Iceland there were smaller ones which met oftener in the Hrepps or parishes into which the quarters were divided up.

Although so many people came to the Althing, there was only a small number of them who took

part in making or carrying out the laws. These few formed a law-court which was called the Lögretta. It had three benches ; in the middle bench sat the chiefs, or Godar, from the four quarters, and in the benches in front and behind sat two chosen retainers of each. There were 144 members of this law-court.

This was the plan on which the Free State or Commonwealth of Iceland was made, and it lasted for four hundred years.

Ulfiot was elected Speaker of the law, or Lawman. This meant that he was chief of the Althing, and that, standing at the brink of the Great Rift on the peak called the Rock of the Law, he had to say over the laws by heart to all the people, who stood on the sunken floor of the Great Rift below, with the sides towering up like walls on either hand. For in those days laws were not written in Iceland, because books were not made there then. He had also to decide what the law said on many matters. We shall hear in the next chapter of a notable case, when the Speaker of the law had to decide which of two faiths should be the Faith of the new state. His was the voice of the people, in remembering past laws as well as declaring new ones ; he did not speak for himself, he had simply to put the wishes and needs of the people, and the judgment of the Lögretta, into words. He had to be a man of great powers of

memory and judgment. A new Speaker of the law was elected every three years, but some served many years.

Many of the Icelanders were great lawyers, as Fiddle-Mord, who "was so great a lawyer that no judgments were thought lawful unless he had a hand in them," or Nial, who "was so great a lawyer that his match was not to be found, . . . of good counsel, and ready to give it, and all that he advised men was sure to be the best for them to do. Gentle and generous, he unravelled every man's knotty points who came to see him about them."

During the age of the Free State, Iceland had made a great stride from the time when the settlers quarrelled for land and the *Godar* rivalled one another in power and riches. Each *Gode*, indeed, had less power in this new order of things, but all the *Godar* together had more, and the people were happier.

So while the other islands of these northern seas were lurking-places for sea-rovers and plunderers, Iceland became a home for such as loved peace and security, and were tired of war. The story of the Free State in Iceland is simple, because it is not mixed up with that of other countries. In Iceland, shut in by the sea, law and order grew by degrees, unhindered by any enemies from without. For Iceland was then too far for the hands of the kings of Norway or England to reach.



But although they had not to fight battles with invaders of their island, they had a battle to fight constantly with such foes as hard seasons and storms, poverty and hunger, the old giants, frost and fire. But in this battle they were conquerors, for the age of the Free State was the age of heroes in Iceland. Nor did they lose the love of roving that had led their fathers to the island. Icelanders discovered Greenland at the end of the 9th century, and some years later an Icelander named Eirik the Red went to visit it. "Eirik said to his people that he proposed to seek for the land which Gunnbeorn, the son of Ulf the Crow, saw when he was driven westwards over the ocean. . . . He promised that he would return to visit his friends if he found the land. . . ." In the summer Eirik went to live in the land which he had discovered, and which he called Greenland; "because," said he, "men will desire much the more to go there if the land has a good name."

A son of Eirik's, who was called Leif the Lucky, discovered America, many years later. He was sailing from Norway to Greenland. "He was tossed about a long time out at sea, and lighted upon lands of which before he had no expectation. There were fields of wild wheat, and the vine-tree in full growth. There were also the trees which were called maples, and they gathered of all this certain tokens; some trunks so large that they

were used in house-building." They called it "Wine-land the good," because of the wild grapes and fine trees and fisheries.

Many of the Icelanders went abroad to other countries, and, being brave men, entered the guards of the kings of Norway, England, and Scotland. There is a story of an Icelandic who fought in a great battle in Ireland.

"Then fight broke out through all the host; Thorstein, Hall of the Side's son, stood still while all others fled, and tied his shoe-string.

"Then one asked why he fled not as the others. 'Because,' said Thorstein, 'I can't get home to-night, since I am at home out in Iceland.'" You will be glad to hear that Thorstein was given his life after that.

In the "Story of King Harold the Stern" there is a beautiful story about an Icelandic named Audun and a Greenland bear.

Audun went to Greenland one winter, and gave all the money he had for a white bear, "well-tamed, and the greatest treasure of a bear that had ever been heard of." He sailed to Norway in the summer, and made up his mind to give the bear to King Sweyn of Denmark. But at that time King Harold of Norway and King Sweyn were at war.

"It happened, too, that Harold was then in the town whither Audun came, and he soon heard how

an Icelander had come from Greenland with such a tame white bear. The king sent at once for Audun; so he went before the king and greeted him. The king took his words well, and asked—

“‘Hast thou that white bear which is such a treasure?’

“‘I have,’ says Audun.

“The king said: ‘Wilt thou sell us the beast for the same price as thou gavest for it?’

“‘I will not do that, lord,’ says Audun.

“‘Wilt thou,’ says the king, ‘that I give thee twice as much, and that is fairer, if indeed thou gavest for it all thy money?’

“‘I will not do that, lord,’ he said.

“‘Wilt thou give it me, then?’ said the king.

“‘That, too, I will not do,’ says the Icelander.

“‘What wilt thou do with it, then?’ said the king.

“Audun answers: ‘What I have already made up my mind to do; go south to Denmark, and give it to King Sweyn.’”

Then the king asked him if he had not heard of the fighting between the two lands, and whether he thought he could get in safety to Denmark, when many others could not.

“Audun answers: ‘Lord, this now lies in your power, but I will say yes to no other way than the one I have already spoken of and made up my mind to follow.’”

Then the king allowed him to go, but on this condition, that he came to him on his way back, and told him what King Sweyn gave for the beast. Audun promised to do this, and went on his way. But when he reached Denmark, he had spent all his money, and had to beg food for the bear and himself. There was a bailiff of King Sweyn's called Auki, and to him Audun went, and asked for food, and told him his tale.

"Auki answers: 'I will sell thee food if thou wilt.'

"'I have nothing to give for it now,' said Audun, 'but I would be glad to hit upon some way of bringing the beast to the king, for it were great scath if so precious a thing were to die on my hands.'

"Auki said: 'Ye'll both of ye need much food before ye get to the king. And now, I'll make ye this offer: I will feed ye both till then, but then I must have half the beast; and what thou hast now to look at is this—that thou wilt not have even half of it if it starves to death on thy hands.'"

Audun thought this a hard bargain, but had to agree to it, and so they went till they found the king, and Audun said—

"'I am a man from Iceland, new come from Norway, but before that, I came from Greenland. My errand hither was to give you this white bear, which I bought out there in Greenland with all my goods

but a great change has befallen me, for now I own no more than half of the beast.'"

And so he told his story to the king.

Then the king was very angry with Auki, and made him a beggar, and sent him from his sight, but spared his life. But he accepted the bear, and asked Audun to stay with him. Audun stayed a little while, and then "he said he was eager to go away. The king was rather slow in answering him," and asked him what he wanted to do.

Then Audun said he wanted to go to Rome. "Then the king said: 'Hadst thou not taken such good counsel, I had been very angry at thy eagerness to go away, but now thou shalt not be thwarted in the least.'

"So the king gave him much silver, and settled all about his journey, and put him in the way of going in company with other pilgrims, and bade him to come and see him when he came back."

So Audun went south; but when he was coming back he took a great sickness, and lay long abed. All the money was spent which Sweyn had given him, and his companions went on and left him. At last he rose from his sickness, and was quite thin and weak, nor had he a penny to buy food. Then he took to wandering like a beggar, and went along begging his food, till he came back to Denmark about Easter, to a town where King Sweyn hap-

pened to be. By this time Audun had his hair close-cropped, and scarce a rag to his back, vile and poor in every way; and so he dared not show himself among the throng of men. He hung about the cloisters of the church, and thought to choose his time to meet the king when he went to Nones, or midday service; but when he saw the king coming, and his train so bravely dressed, he was ashamed to show himself before their eyes.

But when the king was going again to church at evensong-time, he caught sight of a man and called out to him, and Audun came and fell at the king's feet.

"The king knew him at once, and took him by the hand and made him welcome. 'And now,' he says, 'thou art greatly changed since we saw one another last, for I scarce knew thee!'

"So the king led him into the hall there and then; but all the king's train laughed at Audun as soon as they saw him. But the king said—

"'Ye have no need to laugh at him, vile and mean though he seems to ye to look on; he hath seen better to his soul's health than ye, and therefore to God's eye he will seem bright and fair!'

"Then the king made them get ready a bath, and waited on him with his own hands, and gave him afterwards good clothes, and made much of him in every way. So Audun soon got back his strength

and health, for he was young in years, and there he stayed a while. He knew, too, how to behave himself among the crowd of men; he was an easy-tempered, word-weighting man, and not given to gossip. So all men liked him; and as for King Sweyn, he was most gracious to him."

But one day the king asked Audun to stay with him always, promising "to treat him honourably in all things. Audun answers: 'God thank you, lord, for your generous offer, and for all the honour you show me, but I have set my heart on sailing out to Iceland.' 'This seems to me a most wonderful choice,' said the king. Then Audun said: 'I can't bear to think that I am sitting here with you in great honour and happiness, while my mother tramps about on the beggar's path out yonder in Iceland; for now the time is up during which I gave her means to live, before I sailed away from home.'"

The king said this was "spoken like a good man and true," but he made Audun stay till the ships were ready to sail in spring. He gave Audun "a fair ship," well laden, and a "leathern bag full of silver," and last of all, a gold ring from his own arm, saying, "'Though things go so ill that thy ship goes to pieces, and all thy goods and money be lost, still thou wilt not be penniless, if thou comest to land with this ring, . . . and so it will be seen that thou hast met King Sweyn Wolfson, if thou holdest

fast the ring, though thou lovest the rest of thy goods. And now I will give thee this bit of advice, never to part with this ring, for I wish thee to enjoy it to the uttermost, unless thou thinkest thyself bound to repay so much goodness to some great man as to deem it right that thou shouldst give him a great treasure. When thou findest such an one, give him the ring, for it is worth a great man's while to own it; and now farewell, and luck follow thy voyage.' That was what King Sweyn said.

"After that Audun put to sea, and ran into a haven in Norway, and as soon as he heard where King Harold was, he set out to find him, as he had given his word. So Audun came before king Harold and greeted him, and the king took his greeting kindly.

" 'Sit here now and drink with us,' said the king.

"So Audun sat and drank. Then King Harold asked—

" 'Well, how did King Sweyn repay thee for the white bear?'

" 'In that wise, lord,' says Audun, 'that he took it when I gave it.'

" 'In that wise I had repaid thee myself,' says the king. 'What more did he give thee?'

" 'He gave me silver to go south on pilgrimage.'

"The king answers: 'King Sweyn has given many a man before now silver to go on pilgrimage, or



to help his need, though he had not brought him things of price. What hast thou more to say ?'

" 'He asked me,' answers Audun, 'to become his henchman, and to give me great honour if I stayed with him.'

" 'That was well spoken,' says the king ; 'but he must have repaid thee with more still.'

" Audun said : 'He gave me a big merchantman, full laden with the best of freight.'

" 'That was a noble gift,' says the king, 'but I would have given thee as much ; or did he give thee anything more ?'

" Audun answers : 'He gave me, besides, a leathern bag full of silver, and said I would not then be penniless if I held fast to it, though my ship went to pieces off Iceland.'

" 'That was nobly thought of,' answers the king, 'and that I would not have done. I should have thought myself free if I had given thee ship and lading. Gave he aught besides ?'

" 'Yes, lord, he did,' says Audun, 'he gave me this ring which I have on my arm, and said it might so happen that I lost all my goods and the ship too, and yet he said I should not be penniless if I still had the ring. He bade me also not to part with the ring unless I thought that I owed so much to some great man for his goodness that I ought to give it him ; but now I have found that man, for

it was in your power, lord, to take my bear from me, and my life too, but you let me go in peace to Denmark, when no one else could get thither.' The king took the ring blithely, and gave Audun good gifts in return, before they parted. So Audun sailed to Iceland that very summer, and all thought him the luckiest of men."

And now you will like to hear what one of those Free State heroes was like. Here is a description from an Icelandic book, which has been put into English for us by Sir George Dasent.

"Gunnar was a tall man in growth, and a strong man,—best skilled in arms of all men. He could cut, or thrust, or shoot, if he chose, as well with his left as with his right hand, and he smote so swiftly with his sword that three seemed to flash through the air at once. He was the best shot with the bow of all men, and never missed his mark. He could leap more than his own height, with all his war-gear, and as far backwards as forwards. He could swim like a seal, and there was no game in which it was any good for any one to strive with him; and so it has been said that no man was his match. He was handsome of feature, and fair skinned. His nose was straight, and a little turned up at the end. He was blue eyed, and bright eyed, and ruddy cheeked; his hair thick, and of good hue, and hanging down in comely curls. The most courteous of men was

he, of sturdy frame and strong will, bountiful and gentle, a fast friend, but hard to please when making them."

Gunnar and his friends went to Denmark one year, but they came home early in the summer, before the Thing met.

"And when they came home all men were glad to see them. They were blithe and merry to their household, nor had their haughtiness grown while they were away." The story goes on to tell how Gunnar went to the Thing and fell in love there and asked for a wife.

"So Gunnar rode, and they all rode. But when they came to the Thing, they were so well arrayed, that none could match them in bravery: and men came out of every booth to wonder at them. . . . Many men came to see Gunnar and ask tidings of him; and he was easy and merry to all men, and told them all they wished to hear.

"It happened one day that Gunnar went away from the hill of the law, and passed by the booths of the men from Mossfell; then he saw a woman coming to meet him, and she was in goodly attire; but when they met she spoke to Gunnar at once. He took her greeting well, and asks what woman she might be. She told him her name was Hallgerda (she was a widow now, Glum was dead). She spoke up boldly to him, and bade him tell her of his

voyages ; but he said he would not gainsay her a talk. Then they sat them down and talked. She was so clad, that she had on a red gown, and had thrown over her a scarlet cloak trimmed with needlework down to the waist. Her hair came down to her bosom, and was both fair and full. Gunnar was clad in the scarlet clothes which King Harold had given him ; he had also the gold ring on his arm which Earl Hakon had given him. So they talked long out loud, and at last it came about that he asked whether she was unmarried. She said so it was, 'and there are not many who would run the risk of that.'

" 'Thinkest thou none good enough for thee ? '

" 'Not that,' she says, 'but I am said to be hard to please in husbands.'

" 'How wouldst thou answer were I to ask for thee ? '

" 'That cannot be in thy mind,' she says.

" 'It is, though,' says he.

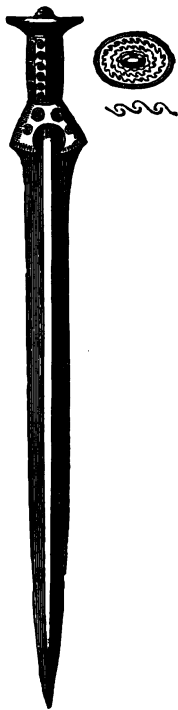
" 'If thou hast any mind that way, go and see my father.'

" After that they broke off their talk.

" So Gunnar and Hallgerda got betrothed, and Gunnar went to see his best friend Nial on his way home from the Thing, and told him of the bargain he had made. He took it heavily, for he knew that Hallgerda was not good-tempered. But

Gunnar said, 'She shall never spoil our friendship,' and he asked Nial to the wedding."

We shall hear more about Gunnar and his wife Hallgerda with her beautiful fair hair.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CHANGE OF FAITH.

ABOUT the time when the settlement of Iceland took place, the Vikings got to hold a wonderful belief. They thought that it had been revealed to Woden, the chief of the gods, that a time would come when the power of the gods would cease; when gods and fiends would have a great struggle, which would end in the defeat of the gods. It gave a sorrowful touch to the religion of men when they could say, "This faith will last for my life, and perhaps for that of my children, but shall not my children's children see *Ragnarok*—that is, *the twilight of the gods*?" For so they named the time of war after which the gods who had ruled so long should be put away for ever, and new powers rule in their stead: for they looked on it as twilight coming between a long day and a dark night.

In the ninth and tenth centuries most European countries were Christian, and the Northmen who went to these countries were always hearing about the new faith of Christ. Many of them,

indeed, had their foreheads signed with the cross (although they would not be baptized), in order to be able to eat and trade with Christians. The twilight of the gods had indeed come. The struggle had begun in the minds of men, who had to fight with two things—their love of the old religion, and their belief in the new. The first Christian who came to Iceland was among the early settlers—the Lady Aud the Deep-minded. She was baptized, and loved the Faith much. “She had a place of prayer at the Cross-hills; there she had a cross raised, for she was a christened woman, and of right faith. Her kinsmen afterwards had great reverence for these hills.”

At a time when any great change is happening, there are always a few wise men who are ready for it, although most of their fellows are still living quite happily in a state which has become a kind of bondage to the few, because they are wise. So it was in Iceland. About the time when the first Althing met (930) there was born in Iceland a man named Nial. He afterwards became a notable figure in the island on account of his wisdom, his courage, and his misfortunes. When Christianity began to be talked about, Nial one day heard many men speaking about it. And they said it was a strange and wicked thing to cast off the old faith. Then Nial said: “It seems to me as though

this new faith must be much better, and he will be happy who follows this rather than the other ; and if those men come out hither who preach this faith, then I will back them well." He was one of the few who were ready for a change.

One of the first Icelanders who became Christian was Thorwald Kodransson. He went on his travels, and in Saxony he made friends with a bishop called Frederic, by whom he was baptized. He persuaded the bishop to return home with him and help him to preach to his people. They reached Iceland in 981. The bishop preached in German, and Thorwald turned all his words into Icelandic ; but they made few converts, and were generally received with scorn and bitter hatred.

Thorwald, though a gentle, kindly man, was angered at their lies and insults, and revenged himself with bloody deeds, which only harmed his cause. Both he and the bishop left Iceland in 986. The bishop went home, but Thorwald went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and afterwards entered a Russian monastery, where he died, and was held holy as a saint after death. A countryman of his, called Brand the Traveller, wrote afterwards—

" Christ hath given Thorwald rest,  
I have been where he lies still ;  
He is buried by the Dnieper  
At St. John's Church on a hill."



In the beginning of the eleventh century there was a noble king named Anlaf, or Olaf, in Norway, who had turned Christian and been baptized in England. Being a zealous king, he not only wished his own people to become Christians, but also the people in other lands—the Scotch islands, Iceland, and Greenland. To Iceland he sent a missionary named Stephen, a born Icelfander and follower of his, who had been baptized with him in England. Stephen preached fearlessly, but had few hearers ; so he took to spoiling the temples. These rude deeds were resented, and a law was made at the Althing decreeing exile, not only to the doer of such deeds, but also to his kinsmen. Stephen's kinsmen promptly rose in a body, and banished him. And he came back to King Olaf, saying Iceland would be converted late or never.

The king's second missionary was a German priest named Thangbrand. He was a brave, forcible man, and his preaching was listened to ; he even ventured to preach at the Althing. There are many stories about him. He was called "the wolf of the gods," or outcast from Walhalla. Once he had an argument with a woman named Steinvora, who preached the heathen faith to Thangbrand, and made him a long speech. Thangbrand held his peace while she spoke, but made a long speech after her, and turned all she had said the wrong way against her.

“‘Hast thou heard,’ she said, ‘how Thor challenged Christ to single combat, and how He did not dare to fight with Thor?’

“‘I have heard tell,’ says Thangbrand, ‘that Thor was nought but dust and ashes, if God had not willed that he should live.’

“‘Knowest thou,’ she says, ‘who it was that shattered thy ship?’

“‘What hast thou to say about that?’ he asks.

“‘That I will tell thee,’ she says, and she sang a song, which ran thus:—

“‘Thangbrand’s vessel from her moorings,  
Sea-king’s steed (ship) Thor, wrathful, tore,  
Shook and shattered all her timbers,  
Hurled her broadside on the beach;  
Ne’er again shall Viking’s snow-shoe (ship)  
On the briny billows glide,  
For a storm by Thor awakened  
Dashed the bark to splinters small.’”

We do not hear what answer Thangbrand made to the song; but many of his hearers believed and were baptized. Then much anger arose, and afterwards fighting, which led to Thangbrand’s banishment. And he too returned to King Olaf, saying, “Iceland will never be converted.” Nevertheless Iceland owes Christianity as much to him as to any man, for although he had a very hard time there, his preaching did its work.

In the year 1000 King Olaf sent his last missionaries, two Icelanders, named Sholto—that is, the Shetlander—and Gizur. They “made ready their ship to go to Iceland. Many and many a man strove to keep back Sholto, but of that took he small heed. . . . They touched at Westmanna Eyiar, and anchored opposite the high place of Ore, and took ashore their baggage and the timber for church-building which King Olaf had had hewn, and they gave out that a church should be built on the spot where they had first shot ashore their gangways. Before the church was built lots were cast to settle on which side of the bay it should stand, and the lot fell on the north side, where before had been sacrifices and high places of the gods. Two nights they abode in the isle before they went up the country, and this they did on the day when people were riding to the Thing.”

They “sent word to the Althing that their friends and kin should ride to meet them, for they had heard that their foes thought of holding the Thingvalla against them. . . . So they rode on to the Thing in a great company, to the booth of Asgrim Ellide-grimsson, who was Gizur’s nephew. And lo! the heathen men leaped in, armed to the teeth, and they were terribly near having to fight; yet some there were of them who were not Christian, and yet wished to stave off the trouble.

“There was a priest . . . whom King Olaf had got for Sholto and Gizur, and he sang masses on the brink of the Rift, above the booth of the West Firth men, throughout the day ; thence they went on to the hill of the law. Here were seven men in priest’s robes, and they had two crucifixes. . . . The whole assembly of the Thing was on the hill of the law. Sholto and his men had incense glowing, and there was scent of the fragrance against the wind, even as before the wind. Then Sholto and Gizur set forth their message bravely and well, and all men marvelled how well-spoken they were, and how well they were taken. And such awe followed their speech that none of their foes durst take up speech against them.” In the midst of the confusion “a man came springing in, and said that the earth-fire had come up in Olfus. . . . Then the heathen men said their say, ‘No wonder the gods be angry at such tales.’”

But one, Snorre the priest, who was not a Christian, pointed in answer to the old lava on which they stood, saying, “Why then were the gods angry when this lava was hot?” Finally it was agreed that the speaker of the law should decide what course was to be taken. “Now he was as yet not baptized, and when people came into the booth he lay down and wrapped his head in a cloak, and lay all day and all night, and as long again

next day. The heathen had summoned a multitude, and were taking counsel to offer up two men from each quarter, and were praying the heathen gods to prevent the spread of Christianity over the land. Sholto and Gizur had another meeting of Christians, and declared they wished to have their sacrifice too, just like the heathen. This is what they said: 'The heathen sacrifice the worst men, and push them over crags and precipices: but we will choose men by their virtues, and call them the offering to our Lord Jesus for victory. Thus we shall live better and more warily against sin, and we two, Sholto and Gizur, are to offer ourselves for our quarter as a victory-offering.' Then two men came forward for the three other quarters.

"Next day the speaker of the law got up, and gave out in the booth that all should go to the hill of the law. And when they were all come to the hill of the law, he said that it seemed to him to have come to a hopeless pass in the land, that men should not have one set of laws here in Iceland, and he begged them not so to act: battles, he said, and war would surely come of it, and that would open the door to the land's desolation. Then further he talked of two kings—one in Denmark and one in Norway, who had striven together long, until the people of each country constrained them and made peace between them, even as they would

not; and it went so far that in a few years they were exchanging gifts, and each held the other in favour while they lived. 'And good rede it seems to me not to let the will prevail of those who are most eager on either side, but to make a middle way between them, so that each side keep somewhat of its own suit, and we all have one law and one faith, for, sooth to say, *Broken laws breed broken peace.*'"

This was his "rede" or counsel—that all men should be baptized and believe in one God, that the temples should become churches, and all public worship of the gods be forbidden; but there should be no law against private worship.

This course was agreed upon, and all present were baptized. So the few triumphed.

Many went on worshipping the gods in secret, and many were baptized without knowing much about Christ, like one of Thangbrand's converts, of whom we are told—

"It so happened one morning that Thangbrand was out early and made them pitch a tent on land, and sang mass in it, and took much pains over it, for it was a great high day.

"Hall spoke to Thangbrand, and asked, 'In memory of whom keepest thou this day?'

"'In memory of Michael the Archangel,' says Thangbrand.

“‘What follows that angel?’ asks Hall.

“‘Much good,’ says Thangbrand; ‘he will weigh all the good that thou doest, and he is so merciful that whenever any one pleases him he makes his good deeds weigh more.’

“‘I would like to have him for my friend,’ says Hall.

“‘That thou mayest well have,’ says Thangbrand; ‘only give thyself over to him by God’s help this very day.’

“‘I only make this condition,’ says Hall, ‘that thou givest thy word for him that he will then become my guardian angel.’

“‘That I will promise,’ says Thangbrand.

“Then Hall was baptized, and all his household.”

It was in the year 1000 that, as an old writer says, “those tidings befell—the best that have ever befallen here in Iceland—that the whole land became Christian, and that all folk cast off the old faith.”

It is a strange tale. Many peoples have become Christian because the fear of the sword compelled them; few have made the change as the Icelanders did. But we must remember that it must have been more gradual than it appears to us. The restlessness in the minds of the Vikings, the change in the minds of thinking men, the christening of other countries,—all these things pointed to a time when the resistance of the more ignorant people

would be vain, and the twilight of the gods in Iceland would be followed by the dawn of Christianity.

The gods themselves and the belief in them died hard, though nowadays the memory of the old faith lingers chiefly in names—names of flowers, like “Balder’s eyebrow,” or “Loke’s purse,” or “Tew’s violet;” the name of the star of Venus—“Friggia’s star,” and some names of men and women.

Thor especially was a much-loved god, and sometimes the sign of Thor’s hammer was made over food or marked on the forehead, just as Christians used the sign of the cross.

One of the early settlers, named Helge, was “much mixed in his faith. He believed in Christ, though he called upon Thor on his voyages or in great jeopardy. When Helge saw Iceland, he set about inquiring of Thor where he should settle down, and the oracle counselled him to go to the north of the land. Then Rolf, his son, asked whether Helge would sail even into the frozen deep (Arctic Sea) if Thor counselled him to go thither. For the crew thought it late to be on the deep, since much of the summer was gone.”

There is a story about one of Thor’s worshippers called Thorhall. He was named “the sportsman.” He was “a big man, dark, and of gaunt appearance; rather advanced in years, overbearing in temper, of



melancholy mood, silent at all times, underhand in his dealings, and withal given to abuse, and always inclined towards the worst. He had kept himself aloof from the true faith when it came to Greenland."

He went with a company of explorers who sailed from Greenland to the land which was not yet called "America." They came to a haven where they "carried their cargo ashore from the ships, and there they prepared to stay. They had with them cattle of all kinds, and for themselves they sought out the produce of the land thereabout. There were mountains, and the place was fair to look upon. They gave no heed to anything except to explore the land, and they found large pastures. They remained there during the winter, which happened to be a hard one, with no work doing; and they were badly off for food, and the fishing failed. Then they went out to the island, hoping that something might be got there from fishing, or from what was drifted ashore. In that spot there was little, however, to be got for food, but their cattle found good sustenance. After that they called upon God, praying that He would send them some little store of meat, but their prayer was not so soon granted as they were eager that it should be. Thorhall disappeared from sight, and they went to seek him, and sought for three half-days

continually. On the fourth half-day the captains of the settlers found him on the peak of a crag. He lay with his face to the sky, with both eyes and mouth and nostrils wide open, clawing and pinching himself, and reciting something. They asked why he had come there. He replied that it was of no importance; begged them not to wonder thereat; as for himself, he had lived so long they needed not to take any account of him. They begged him to go home with them, and he did so. A little while after a whale was driven ashore, and the men crowded round it, and cut it up, and still they knew not what kind of whale it was. Even the captain knew it not, though he had great knowledge of whales. It was cooked by the cook-boys, and they ate thereof, though sickness came upon all from it afterwards. Then began Thorhall, and said: 'Has it not been that the Redbeard (Thor) has proved a better friend than your Christ? This was my reward for the poem which I made in praise of Thor, my patron; seldom has he failed me.' Now when the men knew that, none of them would eat of it, and they threw it down from the rocks, and turned with their supplications to God's mercy. Then was granted to them opportunity of fishing, and after that there was no lack of food that spring." But as for Thorhall, he went off into the wilderness and was no more heard of.

Thor still keeps one day in the week, all over the northern countries of Europe, for it is called by his name—in Denmark and Sweden, *Tors-dag* ; in Germany, *Donners-tag* ; in England, *Thursday* ; and as it used to be in Iceland, *Thors-dagr*. There are many stories, too, about him, and tales of his having been seen again in the busy streets and ports, a huge, sad figure, looking upon the places and people that knew him no more.

There is a story told about the fairies just before the coming of the new faith, which shows exactly what men felt about the change of faith. It is called "The Little Story of Thidrande," and here it is :—

"There was a Northman named Thorhall, who came out to Iceland in the days of Earl Hakon. . . . He dwelt at Horgsland. Thorhall was a wise man, and very full of foresight, and was called Prophet Thorhall.

"Prophet Thorhall dwelt at Horgsland, when Sidu-Hall dwelt at Hof in Swanfirth, and was bound to him in the greatest friendship. Hall was a guest at Horgsland every summer when he rode to the Thing. Thorhall also often went east that way to the bidding or invitation of Hall, and stayed there all the time with him.

"The eldest son of Hall was named Thidrande. He was the most beautiful and promising of men, and Hall loved him best of all his sons. Thidrande went

about the country as soon as he was old enough : he was most beloved wherever he came, because he was the most accomplished of men, gentle, and kind to every soul.

“ One summer Thorhall invited his friend Hall east when he rode from the Thing. Thorhall went east somewhat later than Hall, and Hall greeted him as gaily as ever. There Thorhall dwelt the summer through, and Hall said he was not to go home before the Autumn-bidding was over.

“ That summer Thidrande came out to Berafirth, being then eighteen, and went home to his fathers ; folk marvelled much at him, as often before, and praised his accomplishments, but Prophet Thorhall was always silent when folk praised him most.

“ Once Hall asked him how that was, ‘ that thou settest so little by the good estate of my son Thidrande ; for all that thou sayest weighs with me, Thorhall.’

“ Thorhall answered, ‘ What weighs with me is not that I mislike anything in him or in thee, or that I see less than other men that he is the best of men to know ; but this is rather what I feel, that there are many to praise him, and that he is much deserving thereof, little as he makes of himself. But it may well be that there shall not be joy of this for much longer. And then you will have regret enough for your son, noble fellow that he is, though now

everybody does not praise his accomplishments to your face.'

"And as the summer wore on, Thorhall became very melancholy, and Hall asked him how that was.

"Thorhall answered, 'I have 'an ill heart for this autumn-feasting, for I have a foreboding that a prophet shall be slain at this banqueting.'

"'I can put you at your ease thus,' said the yeoman: 'I have an ox ten years old, whom I call Prophet, because he is wiser than most other beasts, and him I am to slay at the autumn-banqueting. So this must not sadden you, for I think that this banquet of mine will be an honour to you and to my other friends.'

"Thorhall answered, 'It was not because I was afraid for my own life that I noticed this. And I have a foreboding of greater and more wondrous tidings than I am minded now to utter.'

"Hall said, 'There is nothing against our putting off the feast.'

"Thorhall answered, 'We must not think of doing that, for all must happen that is fated.'

"The feast was made ready for the winter-nights before Yule; few guests came, for the weather was sharp and troublous.

"And when they were all sitting down to sup in the evening, Thorhall said, 'I would bid every one take this my counsel, that no one go out of the

house to-night, seeing that great harm will come upon him if he stir from here; and let men take no heed of any omen that comes, for it will bode ill if any one answer to it.'

"Hall told the people to obey Thorhall, 'for his words never fail, and it is best to bind a hale limb.'

"Thidrande went about entertaining, as meek and gentle as ever: and when people were going to bed, Thidrande gave up his own bed and lay down on a bench next the wall. And when most of the folk were asleep, there was a knock at the door, but no man showed he heard it: this happened thrice.

"Then Thidrande jumped up and said, 'It is a great shame, every one here making as if asleep, when there must be some guests come.'

"He took his sword in his hand and went out, but saw no man. Then it came into his mind that the guests must have ridden on to the farm-buildings, and he went after them to try and come up with those who were riding hindmost.

"Then he went under the pile opposite, and could hear that folks had ridden from the north to the field; and he saw they were nine women, all clad darkly with drawn swords in their hands. He could also hear that a company had ridden to the field from the south. This also was nine women, all in shining robes and on white horses.

“Then Thidrande thought he would slip in and tell men the vision. But the dark-robed women then came up and set on him, and he fought valourously to defend himself.

“Long afterwards, Thorhall awoke, and asked whether Thidrande was awake, and received no answer, and said he must have lagged somewhere. Then they searched in the farm, and so outwards. There was a moon shining, and a hard frost: they found Thidrande lying wounded, and he was taken in. And when they could get speech with him, he told all just as he had gone through it.

“Next morning at daybreak he died, and was laid in the grave in the ancient fashion. Afterwards, when people were going off, an inquiry was held, and no one knew of any enemies of Thidrande. Hall asked Thorhall what steps he could take about this marvellous accident.

“Thorhall answered, ‘That I know not, but I may make a guess, that these women were no other than the spirits of your kindred. I divine that a change of faith is coming hereafter on us, and that then a better belief is coming on the land. I think that these fairies of yours that have followed this false faith must have foreseen the change, and also that you and your kin would give them up; and now they must have been ill content, not to have got some tribute first from you which they should

have for their own share: but the better fairies must have wished to help him, but could not arrive in time to do so. But now ye in your turn must be glad for those of your kin who are to have that unknown faith, which they preach and follow.'

"But Hall took his son Thidrande's death so heavily, that he did not care to live any longer at Hof; he then moved his home to Thvatta.

"Once at Thvatta, Prophet Thorhall was being entertained by Hall. Hall was lying in one bed, and Thorhall in another bed opposite, and there was a window-hole in the bedroom.

"One morning when they were both awake Thorhall was seen to smile. Hall asked him, 'Why do you smile?'

"Thorhall answered, 'I smile because a great hill is opening, and every soul, great or small (that is—giants, trolls, fairies, dwarfs and all), is packing up baggage, and making flitting-day of it.'

"A little later came the news I am now to relate."

"The news" was the coming of Christ's faith to Iceland, and so ends this weird little story.

But although the old faith is done with, we must not flout nor despise it like an old garment, but rather look at it and touch it reverently like an old banner that has helped many to fight and to die bravely.

The change of faith brought many changes to



Iceland. Many an old custom was given up, such as duelling at the Althing, which was forbidden; people were forbidden, too, to put their new-born babies on the roadside to die, as they used to do when they did not wish to rear them. Some of the old customs were kept with a slight change, as the drinking of toasts at festivals, which they drank to Christ and the Saints instead of to the gods as before.

The change in thought is notable in religious writings. The new beliefs and ideas touched the old heathen ones with a new and strange beauty. Thus in a poem about Woden, he says of himself, "I mind me hanging on the gallows-tree, nine whole nights, wounded with the spear, offered to Woden, myself to myself; on the tree whose roots no man knoweth. They gave me no loaf: they held no horn to me. I peered down, I caught the mysteries up with a cry, then I fell back."

Such writing seems to stand between the two worlds of faith, linking the old stories of the gods with the new one of Christ on the Cross.

Some later writings, more entirely Christian, are very beautiful too. One such is the "Song of the Sun," a vision told by a dead father to his son, some parts of which are like a glorified Pilgrim's Progress through Death, Hell and Heaven. Here is some of it—

"Now I shall begin to tell how happy I was in

this World of Delight; next how the sons of men go down into the grave against their will. . . .

“Happy in every way was I in men’s eyes, for I could not see far before me. Surely the Lord has made this world we live in very full of pleasures.

“Bowed down I sat, drooping a long while; great was my desire to live, but He, the stronger, had His will. . . .

“I saw the sun, right star of day, sink into a world of storm, while on the other side I heard the gates of hell clang heavily. . . .

“I saw the sun, I felt as if I were looking on the glory of God. I bowed to Him for the last time in the world of mortals. . . . Now I shall begin to tell what I saw first when I went into the place of torment:—

“Scorched birds that were souls were fluttering about as thick as flies.

“From the west I saw dragons of despair fly, leaving behind them wakes of fire; they shook their wings, as if, methought, heaven and earth would fall asunder. . . .

“I saw men who in divers ways defrauded others of their own; in crowds they were journeying to the city of greed, bearing burdens of lead.

“I saw men that had robbed many of life and goods; strong venomous dragons kept shooting through their breasts. . . .

"I saw men that had borne false witness against their neighbour; the ravens of hell were pitilessly tearing the eyes out of their heads. . . ."

And now what he saw in heaven :—

"I saw men that had given away much according to the law of God; pure candles were brightly lit above their heads.

"I saw men that with all their hearts had succoured the poor; angels were reading holy books and heavenly writings to them: this is the highest bliss. . . .

"I saw men that had put meat into their mothers' mouths; their beds were softly made on the beams of heaven. . . .

"I saw troops riding along the sky aloft; they are on their way to God, their leaders are men murdered without a cause."

The vision finishes with a prayer :—

"Father Almighty, most glorious Son, Holy Ghost of Heaven, I pray Thee, who hast made us, to deliver us from evil.

"[To his son] This song which I have taught thee thou shalt recite before the living, the Sun's Song, in which no lie shall be found.

"Here we part, but we shall meet again in the great day of gladness.—O my Lord, give rest to the dead and mercy to the living."

## CHAPTER VII.

### SAGA-MAKING.

WE know a great deal about the heroes of the Free State, because Nial and Gunnar, and the rest of them, were so much loved by their countrymen.

Icelanders were never tired of hearing about their skill and courage and clever speeches: their good luck and misfortunes. The winter evenings are very long in Iceland; darkness sets in early in the afternoon, and often there is snow and driving wind out of doors. So the inmates of Icelandic farms and cottages used to gather in the largest room, where there was light and warmth,—all the household, master and mistress, men and maids, and children,—and there, while the men worked and the women spun, one told stories and all listened.

These stories that were told to while away the time were called Sagas, which is the same as our words "saw" or "say." There was never much music or dancing in Iceland in the old days, so they told stories and repeated poems instead; and the long

hours till bedtime went fast enough, while the Saga-teller unfolded his tale. For many generations the Sagas were handed down, almost word for word. Iceland honoured her heroes by remembering them in this way; and it is a greater honour to be kept thus in people's hearts than to be laid in the most costly tomb that can be carven.

After Christianity came to Iceland, there followed a time of peace when learning spread amongst the people, and then the Sagas were first written down. There were poets as well as heroes in the Free State: they were named "Scalds," probably from an Irish word that means *teller of stories*. Many of the Scalds fared abroad, and became poets to the kings of Norway, England, and Ireland.

Their poems and Sagas were not written down till a long time after they had been made, but then they were very carefully written on vellum.

The Greeks had their stories of their old heroes told for them in the long poems of Homer. Well, the Sagas are like these, only they are made in prose.

They are very plain and straightforward in form; they always deal with the life of some hero, telling first of his father and mother, and his childhood; then of his wanderings; then of his life at home in Iceland, and so on till his death, with perhaps a story of revenge added, as people about whom Sagas were made seldom died "like a dog in the chamber-

smoke," as they put it when an old man died in bed. The tale was told quite shortly and simply, with now and again a little word about the common everyday things, the work and the sunshine, to begin or end a chapter, as—"Now the winter leaves the farmyard," or "That summer there came a ship from the sea," or "Next spring was an early spring, and men were busy sowing their corn," or "Now the weather thickens, and a snowdrift falls that night and covers up the paths."

As for the Icelandic poets, their verses are quite in another style, they are sometimes made about a foe, to spite him, or in praise of a friend, to please him. They are not made simply like the prose; the meaning is never quite clear at first sight, but the sound is always fine. The poet liked you to take a little trouble before you enjoyed his verses: it was his pride and art.

Once upon a time an Icelander named Vestein died, and his sister Anda was very sorrowful. After burying him, his friends sat down near the grave and began to talk, and some one asked how Anda bore her brother's death—"Does she weep much?" And the reply was, "I should think thou knowest well how she bears it; she shows it little and feels it much."

Then a song was made about Anda; here are some lines of it:—

"Vestein's voice no longer singeth,  
Pearl on pearl his sister stringeth,  
Gems that round her dark eyes glisten."

This was an Icelandic Scald's way of saying that Anda wept, and the tears rolled down her cheeks, and it is a very pretty way.

Then if he wished to tell something to a sailor-friend in a song, he begins—

"Rider of wind-driven steed, hearken !"

which is his way of saying, "Listen, O sailor !"

He never calls things by their simple names : blood is "the wound's red stream," or the "rill of the wolf," or "the red rain-drops of the fight." A ship is "the swift steed of the waves," or the "sea-stag;" a battle is a "sword-shower," or "a gale of spears;" "spear-storm," or "iron rain." Swords are called "iron leeks," and a wound is "the road of death." A maiden is called "the needle-plier," the "gold bearer," "fair kirtle-wearer," or "the drift-white dear one."

Some of the Icelandic Sagas, like the Saga of "Burnt Nial" are amongst the greatest books in the world : but apart from their being fine works of art, they are important in two ways : first, because they tell us nearly all we know about the old Icelandic religion and customs long ago ; and secondly, because Icelanders cared for their old tales and poems so

much, and remembered them so well, people in Norway and Sweden, Denmark and Germany, and Britain too, may learn much of their own early laws and customs. We owe a great debt to Iceland, for the Saga-makers (all of whose names are unknown to us, and forgotten long ago) wrote about other peoples and countries as well as their own. So it has been said that Iceland explains many a mystery in the English speech and character. Another wonderful thing about the Sagas is that they can be read by the poorest peasant; and as soon as the children can read well, they can read the Sagas with very little trouble, although they were written long ago. This is because the Icelandic language has remained so pure and changed so little since the old Vikings talked to one another as their ships came near the island.

And now you must hear a little of what the Sagas tell about life in Iceland in the Free State times. For out of this life the king's poets and Saga-makers sprang. The gentlefolks and yeomen who lived honest work-a-day lives were helping to make the noble literature which bears witness to their endurance and patience in toil as much as to the courage and brilliant wits of the greatest heroes of the island. For when men's minds and bodies are actively and healthily at work, they are preparing the way for the artists



and poets who are to be born in their midst to make the people and the time famous.

They lived in wooden halls, as they used to in Norway, or in turf-walled cottages, for there was no wood but drift-wood in Iceland. The gentlefolk's halls were long and low, with an entrance at either end, one for the men, and one for the women—a "carle's door" and a "quean's door." Up the middle of the hall were seats and benches, and hearths where fires were lit, whose smoke went up through holes in the roof to the open sky. In the centre of the benches, on either side of the hearths and tables, were two high seats, facing one another, for the chief and his noblest guest. The house-pillars were on either side of the chief's seat. The beds were built into the walls on either side, the whole length of the hall; each was shut off from the rest. The wainscoting on the walls was sometimes painted and carved, and sometimes hung with shields and tapestry.

The doors of the hall were sometimes decorated with the figure-heads of worn-out ships, whose voyages were over. Beside the hall was the ladies bower or chamber, where the women sat and spun and talked to one another. Then there was a fire-room or kitchen, a dairy and store-room.

Outside the buildings was the yard, and by it the home-fields, where hay or corn grew, fenced in with

turf or lava-stones. There were other fields far from the homestead, up the valley or down it, over hills and marshes. One little story shows us how dear the homestead was in the old days. It is about Gunnar, the brave and beautiful Gunnar whom the king loved. Because of a deadly quarrel he was outlawed, like Grettir, for three years. He was to go abroad.

"The day after he got ready for his journey to the ship, and told all his people that he would ride away for good and all; and men took that much to heart, but still they said that they looked to his coming back afterwards.

"Gunnar threw his arms round each of the household when he was ready, and every one of them went out of doors with him; he leant on the butt of his spear and leapt into the saddle, and he and his brother rode away. They rode down to the sea, and as they came to a line in the path Gunnar's horse tripped and threw him off. He turned with his face up towards the Lithe (sloping hill) and the homestead at Lithend, and said, 'Fair is the Lithe; so fair that it has never seemed to me so fair; the corn-fields are white to harvest, and the home-mead is mown; and now I will ride back home, and not fare abroad at all.'"

Gunnar chose to risk death as an outlaw by staying at home, rather than leave the place that was so dear to him.

On high days and feasts the walls were dressed with fine hangings. So we read that "Thorgrim meant to have a harvest feast on the first night of winter, and to sacrifice to Frey. The floor was covered with sedge, and all men were busy putting up the hangings in the hall."

The master of a household led a busy life. He could do well all kinds of carpentry and smith-work. He was out in the fields early, sowing or reaping his corn, or he and his men went out fishing, or sometimes they put on their helmets and took their shields, and then the work was hardest of all, for fighting was a desperate business in those days. They had often to fight in the midst of work of the most peaceful kind. So it was with Thorbiorn, who was an enemy of Grettir the Strong. He had slain Atli, Grettir's elder brother, and in the most cowardly way. "It was wet abroad that day. Atli had sent his house-carles to the mowing, but some of them were north at Horn a-fishing. Atli was at home, and few other men. Thorbiorn came there about high noon; alone he was, and rode up to the outer door; the door was locked, and no men were abroad. Thorbiorn smote on the door, and then drew back behind the houses (outhouses or store-rooms), so that none might see him from the door. The home-folk heard that the door was knocked at, and a woman went out. Thorbiorn had an inkling

of the woman, and would not let himself be seen, for he had a mind to do something else.

"Now the woman went back into the room, and Atli asked who was come there. She said, 'I have seen nought stirring abroad.' And even as they spake Thorbiorn let drive a great stroke on the door.

"Then said Atli, 'This man seeks to see me, and he must have some errand with me, whatever may be the gain thereof to me.'

"Then he went forth and out of the door, and saw no one without. Exceeding wet it was, therefore he went not out, but laid a hand on either door-post, and so peered about him.

"In that point of time Thorbiorn swung round before the door, and thrust the spear with both hands amidst of Atli, so that it pierced him through.

"Then said Atli, when he got the thrust, '*Broad spears are about now,*' says he, and fell forward over the threshold.

"Then came out the women who had been in the room, and saw that Atli was dead. By then was Thorbiorn on horseback, and he gave out the slaying as having been done by his hand, and thereafter rode home."

After a time Grettir the Strong came home from abroad and revenged the slaying of his brother. "He heard that Thorbiorn was at home with few men; and that was after the home-field hay-harvest.

On a fair day Grettir rode . . . to Thorodstead, and came there about noon, and knocked at the door; women came out and welcomed him, but knew him not; he asked for Thorbiorn, but they said he was gone to the meadow to bind hay, and with him his son of sixteen winters, who was called Arnor; for Thorbiorn was a very busy man, and well-nigh never idle.

"So when Grettir knew this, he bade them well-betide, and went his way on the road towards Reeks; there a marsh stretches down from the hill-side, and on it was much grass to mow, and much hay had Thorbiorn made there, and now it was fully dry, and he was minded to bind it up for home, he and the lad with him, but a woman did the raking. Now Grettir rode from below up into the field, but the father and son were higher up, and had bound one load, and were now at another; Thorbiorn had set his shield and sword against the load, and the lad had a hand-axe beside him.

"Now Thorbiorn saw a man coming, and said to the lad, 'Yonder is a man riding toward us; let us leave binding the hay, and see what he wants with us.'

"So Grettir came upon them and they fought, but Grettir slew them both, and withal the woman who was in the meadow saw the slayings, and ran home full of fear, and said that Thorbiorn was slain, and his son both."

When great men's sons grew up in those days they generally sailed away from home and "wandered" for a year or two. There was a young Icelfander named Gunnlaug. He was a poet, and made such bitter verses that he was called "Worm-tongue." He fell in love with a beautiful girl called "Helga the Fair." He wished to become betrothed to her, but her father did not wish her to marry Gunnlaug, although she loved him. At length he said, "Helga shall be vowed but not betrothed to Gunnlaug, and shall bide for him three winters: but Gunnlaug shall go abroad and shape himself to the ways of good men; but I shall be free from all these matters if he does not then come back, or if his ways are not to my liking."

Most young Icelfanders, then, "went abroad and shaped themselves." One of them had to go whether he liked it or not. This was Grettir the Strong, who, when he was a young man, and on his first ride to the Althing, slew a man. He was outlawed for this, and had to stay abroad for three years.

His father had a friend who had a ship, and he sent and asked him to take Grettir in his ship and look after him. This man promised for friendship's sake. Then they made ready to go abroad. But Grettir's father would give him "no faring goods but victuals for the voyage and a little wadmál

(home-spun stuff). Grettir prayed him for some weapon, but Asmund answered, 'Thou hast not been obedient to me, nor do I know how far thou art likely to work with weapons and things that may be of any gain; and no weapon shalt thou have of me.'

"*No deed, no reward,*' says Grettir. Then father and son parted with little love. Many there were who bade Grettir farewell, but few bade him come back.

"But his mother brought him on his road, and before they parted she spoke thus, 'Thou art not fitted out from home, son, as I fain would thou wert, a man so well born as thou; but, meseems, the great shortcoming herein is that thou hast no weapons of any avail, and my mind misgives me that thou wilt perchance need them sorely.'

"With that she drew from under her cloak a sword well wrought, and a fair thing it was; and then she said, 'This sword was owned by Yokul, my father's father, and the earlier Waterdale men, and it gained them many a day; now I give thee the sword, and may it stand thee in good stead.'

"Grettir thanked her well for this gift, and said he deemed it better than things of more worth, and he said, too, that it proved how true the old proverb is, that *best to bairn is mother still*."

Grettir came and went more than once between

Norway and Iceland as time went on, but he was constantly getting into trouble. Once his home-coming was sad enough, for "these tidings came all at once to Grettir: the first that his father was dead; the second that his brother was slain; the third, that he himself was made an outlaw throughout all the land.

"Now Grettir rode home to Biarg," and came there in the dead of night, when all folk were asleep save his mother. He went in by the back of the house, and through a door that was there, for the ways of the house were well known to him, and came to the hall, and got to his mother's bed, and groped about before him.

She asked who was there, and Grettir told her. Then she sat up and kissed him, and sighed withal, heavily, and spake. "Be welcome, son," she said, "but my joyance in my sons is slipping from me; for he is slain who was of most avail, and thou art made an outlaw and a guilty man, and the third is so young that he may do nought for me."

But Grettir quoted an old saying, "*Even so shall bale be bettered by abiding greater bale:*" and he said Atli should be avenged (as you know he was); and afterwards he said, "But on thee shall no trouble fall for my sake."

The mistress and maids of the household were seldom idle; there was always cooking and house-keeping to be done. In summer they helped in the



home-fields, and in the far-fields ; they milked the cattle and looked after the dairy. In winter they were busy with spinning and weaving the vadmál or wadmál : it was a plain woollen stuff, which they wove in hand-loom. "Vad" means stuff, and "mál" means a measure. It was called measuring-stuff, because it was used in old days instead of money ; wages were paid in so many ells of wadmál, or undyed woollen cloth, and it was given in exchange for other things at the market.

Sometimes the women had sadder work to do, when the men were fighting, and "it is told that Halldora, Glum's wife, called on the women to go with her, saying, 'We will bind up the wounds of those men who have any hope of life, whichever party they belong to.'"

Halldora's son was fearfully wounded, but "she bound up his wound and kept watch over him till the fight was over." And afterwards she said she would like to see him die, "if that is all that is left to me." They allowed her to do so, and she had him tenderly lifted, and "when she got home she cleansed his wounds and bound them up, and dealt with him in such a way that he recovered his speech."

The men-servants, "thralls" or slaves, "house-carles" or free farm-men, were at their masters' bidding, were it to find the sheep on bleak pastures

when "the weather was such that the mirk was over all, and still the snowflakes drave down"—or to fight with their masters' foes and perhaps die in their defence. But they had wages for all their services, and if the fishing and the fighting went well, and the sheep were driven home at nights, both thralls and masters found the feast prepared in the hall, and there was the same firelight and the same songs and stories for both.

There was one journey that some of the gentlefolk among the Icelanders took. It was a long one, too, for they went all the way to Rome "on pilgrimage." They went "for their soul's health."

There is a story of a man named Hrafn the Red, who was in battle, and he "was chased out into a certain river; he thought he saw there the pains of hell down below him, and he thought the devils wanted to drag him to them.

"Then Hrafn said—

"'Thy dog, Apostle Peter! hath run twice to Rome, and he would run the third time if thou gavest him leave.'

"Then the devils let him loose, and Hrafn got across the river."

He had been on pilgrimage twice, and he meant to go again.

The age of Saga-writing was the golden age of

learning in Iceland. Schools were set up at the cathedrals, and the literature of other countries was studied as well as that of Iceland.

There were history-makers as well as tale-writers then. The first of these was Are (whose name means "eagle"). He wrote several books, and amongst them a great one called *The Book of the Settling of Iceland*, all about the early days. He had heard about these times from old wise men who were living when the story of Iceland was just beginning. Are's great-grandfather used to tell him that he remembered being baptized at three years old, by Priest Thangbrand.

Another historian who lived much later was Snorre, who was a poet and statesman as well as a history-maker: and last of all, was Sturla, a lawyer, the last of the old history-writers.

Christianity brought monks to Iceland, with their treasured knowledge, kept alive, like an ever-burning lamp, in monasteries, when it was neglected elsewhere. They wrote some of the books of the age—lives of saints, lives of bishops, and stories of miracles.

This golden age of learning is the most memorable time in Icelandic history, because the great Saga-literature was made then.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FOLK-LORE.

"ALL around us had the look of a desert: all was mournful and sad-coloured, and one only heard the sharp cry of the plover, or sometimes the winging of a troop of swans that took to flight upon our approach." So speaks a traveller about the central uninhabited part of Iceland in the day-time: but it must be still more wonderful and mournful at nights, when the moonlight lies on vast solitary lakes that are, we are told, "like the dead sea for silence," or towards morning when the sun rises on dead volcanoes buried in snow.

Do you wonder that dreams came into the people's heads and grew and grew till they became legends and stories and beliefs, a distinct "lore" or learning among the folk? Well, so it was; the hills, and lakes, and seas were peopled to their fancy with all manner of sprites and unearthly beings: elves and trolls, dwarfs and goblins, and sea monsters. It was the first of the old heathen laws

in Iceland that "no one should have figure-heads on ships at sea, or if they had they were to take off the heads ere they came within sight of land, and not to sail to the land with gaping heads and grinning snouts, lest the land-sprites should be scared away."

The elves the people used to believe in in Christian times are called Hidden or Hill Folk, because they live inside hills and underground, in "wide and fair green fields." They are made like men, but have longer lives and sharper wits. They lead the same kind of lives as men do, and keep sheep and go out fishing, and hold meetings, and go to church; but their sheep are always fat sheep, and they catch many fish, for they are a lucky people. There is a story which tells why the elves live underground:—

"Once upon a time God Almighty came to visit Adam and Eve. They received Him with joy, and showed Him everything they had in the house. They also brought their children to Him to show Him, and these He found promising and full of hope. Then He asked Eve whether she had no other children than these whom she now showed Him. She said 'None.'

"But it so happened that she had not finished washing them all, and, being ashamed to let God see them dirty, had hidden the unwashed ones.

This God knew well, and said therefore to her, 'What man hides from God, God will hide from men.' These unwashed children became forthwith invisible, and took up their abode in mounds, and hills, and rocks. From these are the elves descended; but we men from those of Eve's children whom she had openly and frankly shown to God. And it is only by the will and desire of the elves themselves that men can ever see them."

Out in Iceland, when men hear the hum of voices and the splash of oars on the lakes in spring-time, but see no boat nor any boat's crew, they know that the elves are fishing, and it is the sign of a good season. Sometimes when people have lost their way at night, they see a house with lighted windows, and hear the sound of music and merry-making from within. Then they go in at the door and are made welcome, and join in the laughter and dancing, but when morning comes they find themselves lying on the bare rock alone. Then they know that they have seen elfin windows last night in the dark, and have been with no human company.

An elf often comes and asks a favour of a man or woman, and if it is granted, the elf, being a grateful person, gives a beautiful gift in return. So an Icelandic peasant's wife once dreamed that an elf-woman came to her bedside and "begged her to

give her milk for her child, two quarts a day, for the space of a month, placing it always in a part of the house which she pointed out. The good-wife promised to do so, and she remembered her promise when she awoke. So she put a milk-bowl every morning in the place which the other had chosen, and left it there, always on her return finding it empty. This went on for a month : and at the end of the month she dreamed that the same woman came to her, thanked her for her kindness, and begged her to accept the belt which she should find in the bed when she awoke, and then vanished. In the morning, the good-wife found beneath her pillow a silver belt, beautifully and rarely wrought, the promised gift of the grateful elf-woman."

But the elves hate ill-natured people, and will not be friends with them.

There is a story of a man, before whom the rocks opened one night, and he saw the elfin church, whose altar is to the west and whose door to the east. "The night was dark and stormy. When he had arrived at that side of the hill which faced the farm, the rock opened suddenly before him of its own accord, and he saw within endless rows of the brightest lamps. At the same time he heard the sound of music, and bethought himself that this must surely be the time for the elves' public worship. And drawing nearer he came to an open door,

through which he looked, and saw vast crowds of people assembled within. One, who seemed to be a priest, stood, dressed in splendid robes, by an altar, round which were numberless candles burning."

The trolls are giants who dwell in rocks. They are of human shape, but always deformed, though of huge strength and power. They are often very stupid and greedy, but sometimes very good-natured, and so trustworthy, as a rule, that the sayings run, *Trolls seldom break faith, Trolls are best of trust*, and great faith is called *Troll's trust*. But Icelanders go to the trolls as Englishmen go to Jericho and Greeks to the crows. An angry wife says to her husband, "The trolls take thy friends;" and one of Onund Treefoot's enemies sang a wicked little song about him, before a battle, because he had a wooden leg—

"Treefoot, Treefoot, foot of tree,  
Trolls take thee and thy company!"

So it was said to certain men who sat by the fire talking ill of others: "It is worse to say such words than to hold peace: like it is that the trolls have set the tongues wagging in the heads of you."

The sight of daybreak or the sound of church bells is fatal to trolls,—they turn into stone.

Once there lived some Icelanders in a little village so far from a bishop that they somehow got



wrong in their dates and could not remember which day Christmas would be. One of them walked a long way to the nearest bishop to find out. On his way back he met a she-troll. "She gave him a book, which he looked at and found to be a troll-almanack. In giving him this calendar, she said—

"‘If Christ the Son of Mary had done as much for us trolls as you declare that He has done for you human beings, we should scarcely have been so ungrateful as to forget His birthday.’

"Then Olafur (that was his name) said to her, ‘Look eastward ! who rides there on a white horse ?’

"Whereupon the troll turned round, and, as she saw nothing but daybreak, was instantly turned into stone."

That was certainly misplaced "Troll's trust."

There is a little tale told of Brage the poet meeting one of these beings one evening in the twilight. "Who art thou ?" he asks ; and was answered, "They call me Troll : Gnawer of the Moon, Giant of the Gale-blasts, Curse of the Rain-hall (or the heavens), . . . Night roaming Hag, Swallower of the Loaf of Heaven (the 'loaf of heaven' is the sun). What is a fiend but that ?"

Then Brage says, "They call me Poet ; mixer of Woden's Wine, Finder of Woden's Gift, Guileless Bard, Bearer of Woden's Ale, . . . Craftsman of Song. What is a poet but that ?"

There are many stories about trolls. Sometimes in heathen days troll-women were seen, at nights, riding upon wolves, having serpents about the wolves' necks for reins. And to prove how stupid they are, it has been told that a troll, looking at the moon, takes it to be a golden cake. He wishes to have it, and sets off and climbs up the steep mountain-side, never stopping, till at last, getting tired and giddy, he slips and falls, and is dashed to pieces.

This story is a lingering of the old belief that trolls or giant monsters swallowed the sun and moon in eclipses. So the troll was called "Gnawer of the Moon."

The dwarfs are a clever people; they are skilled in mysterious arts, and have knowledge of the past and the future. The swords that are made by them are very well wrought. We hear of one, of which its owner said, "It will bite whatever its blow falls on, be it iron or aught else: nor can its edge be deadened by spells, for it was forged by the dwarfs, and its name is 'Greysteel.'"

There is an old poem used for teaching young people in the heathen days about a dwarf called Allwise. He had been promised the goddess Freya for a wife, and one day he left his cavern and went to fetch his bride, telling his men to make the home ready for her and deck it with green branches. But when he came to the hall of the gods, one of

them—very probably it was Woden—asked him who he was. Then he told them that he was Allwise, a dwarf, who lived under the earth, whose home was in a rock, and that he was come to fetch his bride, for a promise might not be broken.

But Woden said he would break the promise, because he had not been at home when Freya was betrothed, and there could be no weddings amongst the gods without his consent.

Afterwards, however, he said, "You shall have the maid, my wise guest, if you will tell me the things that I wish to know?"

Then he asked Allwise about the different names for things in the different worlds, and the dwarf told him how, though men spoke of "the heaven," the wanes called it "wind-woof," the giants "high-home," the elves "fair-woof," and the dwarfs "drip-hall." (No one knows who "the wanes" were.)

The moon was called "whirling-wheel" in hell, "hastener" among the giants, but the elves call it "year-teller." The rainy clouds were called by the gods "shower-boder," "wet-boder" by the giants, and "weather-main" by the elves. The far travelling wind was called by the gods "waverer," "soft-gale" by the elves, but in hell it was called "whistle-gust." Night is called "unlight" by the giants, "sleep-joy" among the elves, and the dwarfs call it "dream-fairy." Ale is called "draught" by

the wanes, "clear-lees" among the giants, "mead" in hell, but the dwarfs call it "good-cheer."

Then Woden praised the wisdom of Allwise the guest, but as they talked the day broke and the sunshine came into the hall; then the poor dwarf was turned into stone, for Woden had kept him talking while the hours of darkness passed. So Freya stayed at home after all.

The goblins or ghosts are spirits of the dead that come out of their graves, and haunt, sometimes a hall, sometimes a pasture, and sometimes they take to riding on the roofs of houses at nights.

Sea-monsters there are, too, of several kinds, sea-trolls, mermen and mermaids. Now and again a fisherman caught a merman instead of a fish. The mermen can live on land, but get very homesick, and pine away after a time and die if they are not put back into the sea. Once a merman was caught, and the story says they tried to get good counsel from him, asking him what was best, but he would not speak till they promised to let him go again, then he cried out: "Cold water for the eyes! Flesh for the teeth! Linen for the body! Put me back in the sea. No man shall draw me up to his boat from the bottom of the deep again."

Sometimes sea-grey cows were seen feeding near the shore. These belong to the sea-monsters. There were also river sprites in Iceland.

Many fairy stories are treasured up and remembered by the Icelandic peasants. They also have a great number of proverbs and sayings. Here are a few of them. . . .

If children swear, a dusky spot comes on to their tongues.

All must fare when they are fetched.

Old friends are the last to sever.

Things boded will happen, so will things unboded.

Long we remember what youth gained us.

The boy grows, but not his breeches.

Own hand is trustiest.

He is wise who knows himself.

Tongue is head's bane.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ICELANDIC CHILDREN.

It made a great difference to the children in Iceland when the land became Christian. In heathen days, when a child was born it was laid upon the floor, then the father came and looked at it, and if he thought it strong and healthy, he allowed the women to rear it; if not, the poor baby was put on the ground outside the house, where it perished very soon from cold and hunger. Very often a child was put away because it was a girl and not a boy. Sometimes neighbours took pity on the babies and took them in and reared them.

Children that were not brought up by their parents, but by other people, were called foster-children. There are many stories about foster-brothers and foster-sisters in the Sagas.

Once upon a time there was a baby born in Iceland when its father was away at the Thing. Thorstein (that was his name) gave orders that the baby was to be put away because it was a girl. But the

baby was very beautiful, so its mother called her shepherd to her, and said, "Thou shalt take my horse and saddle it, and bring this child west to Herdholt, to Thorgerd, Egil's daughter, and pray her to nourish it secretly, so that Thorstein may not know thereof. For with such looks of love do I behold this child, that surely I cannot bear to have it cast forth. Here are three marks of silver, have them in reward of thy work: but west there Thorgerd will get thee fare and food over the sea."

The shepherd did as she told him, and took the child away; and it was nourished and brought up, and he went abroad.

"Now when Thorstein came home from the Thing, Jofrid his wife told him that the child had been cast forth according to his word, but that the herdsman had fled away and stolen her horse. Thorstein said she had done well, and got himself another herdsman. So six winters passed, and this matter was nowise wotted of."

At the end of that time Thorstein rode to Herdholt to see Thorgerd, who was his sister. She was married to Olaf Peacock.

"Good cheer was made Thorstein, as was like to be; and one day at the feast it is said that Thorgerd sat in the high seat talking with her brother Thorstein, while Olaf was talking to other men; but on the bench right over against them sat three little

maidens. Then said Thorgerd—‘How dost thou, brother, like the look of these three little maidens sitting straight before us?’

“‘Right well,’ he answers, ‘but one is by far the fairest; she has all the goodliness of Olaf, but the whiteness and the countenance of us Meremen.’

“Thorgerd answered: ‘Surely this is true, brother, wherein thou sayest that she has the fairness and countenance of us Mere-folk, but the goodliness of Olaf Peacock she has not got, for she is not his daughter.’

“‘How can that be,’ says Thorstein, ‘being thy daughter none the less?’

“She answered: ‘To say sooth, kinsman,’ quoth she, ‘this fair maiden is not my daughter, but thine.’

“And therewith she told him all as it had befallen, and prayed him to forgive her and his own wife that trespass.

“Thorstein said: ‘I cannot blame you two for having done this; most things will fall as they are fated, and well have ye covered over my folly: so look I on this maiden that I deem it great good luck to have so fair a child. But now what is her name?’

“‘Helga, she is called,’ says Thorgerd.

“‘Helga the Fair,’ says Thorstein; ‘but now shalt thou make her ready to come home with me.’



"She did so, and Thorstein was led out with good gifts, and Helga rode with him to his home, and was brought up there with much honour and great love from father and mother and all her kin."

That is a happy ending to a story with a cruel beginning.

The children in those times had toys to play with just as children have nowadays. There were two little boys named Arngrim and Steinolf who went to stay with their grandmother. Arngrim was six years old and Steinolf four. They were good boys, and were very fond of one another. One day when they were playing together, Steinolf asked Arngrim to lend him the little brass horse which he had. Arngrim answered, "I will give it to you, for, looking to my age, it is more fit for your plaything than mine." Steinolf went and told his mother what a fair gift he had got, and she said it was quite right they should be on such good terms with one another."

In Viking days the babies had cradle songs sung to them. One of the Vikings, after he was grown up, remembered what the song was about, and he said: "My mother said they should buy me a boat and fair oars, and that I should go abroad with the Vikings, should stand forward in the bows and steer a dear bark, and so wend to the haven and cut down man after man there." These were the kind of things Viking babies meant to do when they grew

up. So the young Viking says, "I have walked with bloody brand and with whistling spear, with the wound-bird following me. The Wickings (Vikings) made a fierce attack, we raised a furious storm, the flame ran over the dwellings of men, we laid the bleeding corpses to rest in the gates of the city."

Once a baby named Halldor was left at home while all the household were out at the haymaking. He fell out of his cradle, and lay kicking and sprawling on the floor. There was only an old Viking in the hall, and he was helpless, and could not get out of bed to mind the baby. He could only look at him, and he said: "We are both of us lying helpless on the floor, Halldor and I; youth is the matter with thee, and old age with me. Thou wilt get better, but I never shall!"

But here is a fairy tale of the Christian days, about three children who were at play upon the grass near a certain Icelandic farmhouse. They were a little girl and two boys. "After they had played for some time, the little girl, who was the youngest of them, found a deep hole in the ground, so deep that she could not see to the bottom of it. Stooping down, she thrust her hand into it, and shutting her eyes, cried out in fun, 'Put something into the palm of an old beggar, and old beggar shall not see.' No sooner had she said the words, than

a large silver button was placed in her hand. When the other children saw her good luck they were fit to burst with envy, and the eldest of them, stooping down, stuck his hand into the hole too, and said, 'Put something into the palm of an old beggar, and old beggar shall not see,' for he hoped to get something at least as good as the little girl had got, if not indeed better. But no! Far from it, when he drew his hand out again, he only found that he had lost the use of it, and what is more, never recovered it again. For the elf, who hated envy more than anything in the world, had given it a squeeze."

Icelandic children generally learn their lessons at home, from their mothers, as there are few schools for them to go to, and many of them live far from these. They have to learn a long catechism before they are confirmed; and as it takes a long time to get to know the whole, they learn it bit by bit every winter till they are about fourteen years of age. One Iclander tells how he could not learn this catechism, when he first began, although he was quick at learning by heart. Day after day he tried to get it into his head, and failed, till the people with whom he was thought that he could not be so quick as his aunt who had brought him up had told them. At last, however, he took his book and went to sit in a little room with "John

the Weaver," and while the shuttle went to and fro, and the click, click of the weaving-rod and the weaver's humming to his work was in his ears, he was able to learn so fast, that he learned in five or six weeks what it took other children four years to learn, and he had only to look it over before confirmation, he learned it so well.

If they do have to go to a distant school there is plenty of friendly help for them on the way. An Icelfander writing in an English newspaper a few years ago, gave an account of such a journey.

"They would house me, give me milk and call it water, look to my pony, and shoe it at a need; the good-man himself would show me the way if there was any risk, or ferry me over a fiord, and never take a penny—they would have thought me mad had I offered it."

In Iceland, when people are very poor, instead of being sent to the workhouse, they are taken to live at richer farms. This letter tells later on how "on our farm there were two of these poor inmates . . . one of them a young girl, nearly of my own age. . . . She became a kind of foster-sister to me. We drank of the same cup and ate of the same dish, were clad in the same stuff, were made to do all kinds of errand-work—now to fetch in a pony—(people generally ride in Iceland, and seldom walk, so a pony must be fetched whenever any one goes to

visit a friend. The children have that piece of work to do as a rule)—now a sheep, or a pitcher of water from the brook, or to carry food to the farm-folk out on the land; in short, we went to and fro like a weaver's shuttle: in winter we would gather Icelandic moss together or sit at home capping verses and ditties, a few of which are just about to appear for the first time in a volume of Icelandic poems. . . . Many years later when I went back to Iceland, I found her grown up, and happy, and married to a good husband."

Here are some ditties which were learned by an Icelandic child and remembered and written down when he grew up. This one is about the rain:—

"The weather out of doors is wet  
To-day, and makes me sad :  
But God Almighty, He can make  
To-morrow fine and glad."

This is a child's morning prayer:—

"Now I'm clad and stand upright,  
Jesus, guard me in Thy might ;  
By God's grace, oh, grant to me,  
To pass this day as pleaseth Thee."

This is about a child's copy-book:—

"My strokes are very big and queer,  
And badly made the letter,  
As if the cat had scratched it here,—  
But I can do no better."

This is on a little girl's sampler :—

“She's nine years old, the little girl,  
She's quick to learn what's taught her :  
Every stitch she's sewn herself,  
Holmfrida, Paul's daughter.”

This is to a boy on a journey :—

“Though hoof should slip, and snap go girth,  
'Mid mud on every side ;  
Do you heed neither heaven nor earth,  
But just stick fast and ride !”

This is about a lame leg :—

“Though I've only one good leg :  
Why should I be sad ?  
Into heaven I hope to hop,  
For all I limp so bad.”

This is a rich man's ditty :—

“Nine bairns here, and nineteen cows,  
Nigh five hundred sheep,  
Six and twenty saddle-beasts—  
There's a lot to keep !”

This is a writer's ditty on his pen :—

“This pen, it suits me very well,  
From raven's wing it came,  
I cut it neatly to a nit,  
And Gunlaug is my name.”

This is what the traveller says who raps at the door late at night :—

“God bless this house and all within !  
A guest is at the door !  
Ne'er an answer can I win !  
I can't waken Thor !”

There is a story in one of the Sagas about two foster-children, a brother and sister named Geirmund and Gudrida. But they were parted and lived in different farms. Geirmund used to help to tether the cattle in the dusky evenings. Gudrida used to run errands, and one night her foster-father said to her, "Thou must go over to Saebol (where her brother was) and find out what men are about there: and I send thee because I trust thee best of all in this and in all other things." She was with her master and foster-father at the last, when his foes slew him, and she helped him to fight with a great club.

Not long ago there lived a little Icelandic boy called Jon Jonsson Thorkelsson. He learned to read when he was five years old. He was taught first to know and name both printed and written letters, and then syllables, so that at last he could count up all the syllables at once of any word, and then say the whole word; thus: "bok-staf-ir—bokstafir:" and had not to say, "bok-staf; bokstaf-ir: bok-stafir."

For the next four years he lived happily with his mother; in the winter and spring of the sixth year of his age she made him read all the Bible aloud by her side, both the Old and New Testament.

When he was eight years old he began to want greatly to learn writing. No one in the house could

write, except his half-brother, who had learned a little from his father in childhood, but was now, of course, busy with farming.

Paper, ink, pens, and teaching were all lacking. Jon Thorkelsson's first attempt at writing was to learn to make the letters on a dirty chest-cover, wetting his forefinger in his mouth, and making clean places in the dust in the shape of letters. This did not last long, however, for a neighbour's lad got him a few drops of ink, though Thorkelsson had often to give him some of his dinner in return. Then he found a sea-fowl's feather, which he had heard could be split into a pen, and he jumped home with it to his brother, who split a pen off it with his carving-knife.

Now he had got two things, but the third was lacking—something to write upon. He began to scribble on clean boxes, and smooth bed-posts. But his step-father got angry, and forbade it. Then he was at a loss, till one day he found a white, shining jawbone of an ass. In a moment he put his pen to it, and though it took the ink badly, it was for a long time his only writing-book.

By the time he was nine years old he was writing floods of verses, which made his mother very happy, for she was a clever woman herself.

There were brave children as well as brave men and women in the Free State. You remember



Nial, who was such a good wise man and friend to Gunnar? well, you shall hear why his story is called "The Burning of Nial." His sons had many foes, and one night they surrounded his hall at Bergthor knoll, and set fire to it. The people inside could not get out, nor could they get the flames under, though "the women threw whey on the fire and quenched it as fast as they lit it," for the foes set fire to the roof, and "they who were inside were not aware of it till the whole hall was ablaze over their heads. Then Flosi and his men made a great pile before each of the doors, and then the womenfolk who were inside began to weep and wail.

"Nial spoke to them, and said, 'Keep up your hearts, nor utter shrieks, for this is but a passing storm, and it will be long before ye have another such; and put your faith in God, and believe that He is so merciful that He will not let us burn both in this world and the next.'

"Such words of comfort he had for them all, and others still more strong."

They were a large household, Nial and Bergthora, his wife, their sons and sons' wives and children, and the men and maid servants.

Now the whole house began to blaze. Then Nial went to the door and said, "Is Flosi so near that he can hear my voice?"

Flosi said that he could hear it.

"Wilt thou," said Nial, "take an atonement from my sons, or allow any men to go out?"

"I will not," answers Flosi, "take any atonement from thy sons, and now our dealings shall come to an end once for all, and I will not stir from this spot till they are all dead; but I will allow the women and children and house-carles to go out."

Then the women and children and house-carles went out, and they dressed Helgi, one of Nial's sons, as a woman, and though he spoke against it at first, at last he went out because they prayed him to go.

But when Helgi came out, Flosi said—

"That is a tall woman, and broad across the shoulders, that went yonder; take her and hold her."

But when Helgi heard that he cast away the cloak. He had got his sword under his arm, and hewed at a man, and the blow fell on his shield and cut off the point of it, and the man's leg as well. Then Flosi came up and hewed at Helgi's neck, and took off his head at a stroke.

Then Flosi went to the door and called out to Nial, and said he would speak with him and Berghthora.

Now Nial does so, and Flosi said—

"I will offer thee, Master Nial, leave to go out, for it is unworthy that thou shouldst burn indoors."

"I will not go out," says Nial, "for I am an old

man, and little fitted to avenge my sons, but I will not live in shame."

Then Flosi said to Bergthora—

"Come thou out, housewife, for I will for no sake burn thee indoors."

"I was given away to Nial young," said Bergthora, "and I promised him this then, that we both share the same fate."

After that they both went back into the house.

"What counsel shall we now take," said Bergthora.

"We will go to our bed," said Nial, "and lay us down; I have long been eager for rest."

Then she said to the boy Thord, her grandson—

"Thee will I take out, and thou shalt not burn in here."

"Thou didst promise me this, grandmother," says the boy, "that we should never part so long as I wished to be with thee; and methinks it much better to die with thee and Nial than to live after you."

Then she bore the boy to her bed. And Nial spoke to his steward, and said, "Now shalt thou see where we lay us down, and how I lay us out, for I mean not to stir an inch hence, whether reek or burning smart me, and so thou wilt be able to guess where to look for our bones."

He said he would do so.

There had been an ox slaughtered, and the hide

lay there. Nial told the steward to spread the hide over them, and he did so. So there they lay down, both of them in their bed, and put the boy between them. Then they signed themselves and the boy with the cross, and gave over their souls into God's hand, and that was the last word that men heard them utter. Then the steward took the hide and spread it over them, and went out afterwards. . . . Skarphedinn (Nial's eldest son) saw how his father laid him down, and how he laid himself out, and then he said—

“Our father goes early to bed, and that is what was to be looked for, for he is an old man.”

Now there were left in the hall with them Nial's three sons, Skarphedinn, Kari, and Grim.

“ . . . Then the great beams out of the roof began to fall, and Skarphedinn said, ‘Now must my father be dead, and I have neither heard groan nor cough from him.’ Then they went to the end of the hall, and there had fallen down a cross-beam inside, which was much burnt in the middle.

“Kari spoke to Skarphedinn, and said, ‘Leap thou out here, and I will help thee to do so, and I will leap out after thee, and then we shall both get away if we set about to do so, for hitherward blows all the smoke.’

“‘Thou shalt leap first,’ said Skarphedinn; ‘but I will leap straightway on thy heels.’

“‘That is not wise,’ says Kari, ‘for I can get out well enough elsewhere, though it does not come about here.’

“‘I will not do that,’ says Skarphedinn; ‘leap thou out first, but I will leap after thee at once.’

“‘It is bidden to every man,’ says Kari, ‘to seek to save his life while he has a choice, and I will do so now; but still this parting of ours will be in such wise that we shall never see one another more; for if I leap out of the fire, I shall have no mind to leap back into the fire to thee, and then each of us will have to fare his own way.’

“‘It joys me, brother-in-law,’ says Skarphedinn, ‘to think that if thou gettest away thou wilt avenge me.’

“Then Kari took up a blazing bench in his hand, and runs up along the cross-beam; then he hurls the bench out at the roof, and it fell among those who were outside.

“Then they ran away, and by that time all Kari’s upper clothing and his hair were ablaze; then he threw himself down from the roof, and so crept along with the smoke.

“Then one man said, who was nearest, ‘Was that a man that leapt out at the roof?’

“‘Far from it,’ says another; ‘more likely it was Skarphedinn who hurled a firebrand at us.’

“After that they had no more mistrust.

"Kari ran till he came to a stream, and then he threw himself down into it, and so quenched the fire on him. After that he ran along under shelter of the smoke into a hollow, and rested him there, and that has since been called Kari's Hollow.

"Now it is to be told of Skarphedinn that he runs out on the cross-beam straight after Kari; but when he came to where the beam was most burnt, then it broke down under him. . . . Skarphedinn then went to his brother Grim, and they held one another by the hand and trod the fire; but when they came to the middle of the hall, Grim fell down dead.

"Then Skarphedinn went to the end of the house, and then there was a great crash, and down fell the roof. Skarphedinn was then shut in between it and the gable, and so he could not stir a step thence.

"Flosi and his band stayed by the fire until it was broad daylight. . . . The fire sometimes blazed up fitfully and sometimes burned low, and then they heard down in the fire beneath them that a song was sung."

It was Skarphedinn singing his death song. . . . And by and by Flosi and his men rode away.

It came to pass afterwards that Kari asked man named Hjalti to go and search for Nial's bones.

". . . Hjalti said he would be most willing to bear

Nial's bones to church : so they rode thence fifteen men. They rode east over Thurso water, and called on men there to come with them till they had one hundred men, reckoning Nial's neighbours. They come to Bergthorsknoll at midday. Hjalti asked Kari under what part of the house Nial might be lying, but Kari showed them to the spot, and there was a great heap of ashes to dig away. There they found the hide underneath, and it was as though it were shrivelled with fire. They raised up the hide, and lo ! they were unburnt under it. All praised God for that, and thought it was a great token.

"Then the boy was taken up who had lain between them, and of him a finger was burnt off which he had stretched out from under the hide. Nial was borne out, and so was Bergthora, and then all men went to see their bodies.

"Then Hjalti said, 'How do these bodies look to you ?'

"They answered, 'We wait for thy utterance.'

"Then Hjalti said, 'I shall speak what I say with all freedom of speech. The body of Bergthora looks as it was likely she would look, and still fair ; but Nial's body and visage seem to me so bright that I have never seen any dead man look so bright as this.'

"They all said they thought so too."

Afterwards they found the body of Skarphedinn

where he had died on his feet, and he had driven the blade of his axe deep into a beam, so that it might not be softened by the fire and spoilt. And he had burnt a little cross on his breast and shoulders, in token of his faith, and laid his hands crosswise on his breast one over the other.

But of the end of the story and the wanderings of Kari and of Flosi, who was called "Burning Flosi," and of their meeting at last, and the manner of it, you must read some day for yourselves, in that wonderful book which is called *The Story of the Burning of the Nial*.





## CHAPTER X.

### ICELANDIC BEASTS AND BIRDS.

THE only wild animals in Iceland are the foxes, white, brown, and blue, which are hunted for their skins. A stray white bear floats over from Greenland on a block of ice, sometimes with two or three cubs, but these are either captured or slain as soon as they come ashore.

There are no wild pigs or cats in Iceland, and no hares nor rabbits: neither are there frogs nor serpents, but there are both field mice and house mice. And there are the birds. Their number is astonishing: Iceland is the paradise of birds. They are of many kinds; the sea-eagle, the falcon, raven, sea-parrot, ptarmigan, snipe, golden plover, and others. There are also swans: one monastery was called "the station of swans," and travellers often see them flying in flocks or swimming on the lakes.

These wild swans make the shore white with their feathers, which the children pick up and clean, and sort out for pens to be sent abroad for people to write with, or to make paint-brushes with. Some of them are whistling swans. Then there are eider-ducks.

Birds are greatly prized in Iceland, and are made useful in many ways; for their feathers and down are sold, their eggs and flesh are eaten, and lastly, their bones are used to kindle fires instead of sticks. But most useful of all are the eider-down ducks. They build their nests of sea-weed quite close to the houses, and line them with the fine down plucked from their breasts, so that the nests may be quite soft and warm for the young birds. As soon as the eggs are laid, men go and take the down away from the nest: the duck lines it afresh, and again it is taken away. Sometimes the poor duck lines her nest a third time, making her breast quite bare to do so. There is a law which forbids any one to shoot an eider-duck under penalty, so they become very tame, and allow people to come close to their nests. The down is cleaned and prepared and sent away to other countries, where it is made into eider-down quilts and other warm things. The small islands in the Breidi-fiord are used for keeping these ducks, but Videy Island (near Reykiavik) does the most business in eider-down.

Horses and cows and sheep and pigs (though there are no pigs now) were brought to Iceland by the settlers. Many of them die on the mountains during the severe winters. The horses are quite a peculiar race. They are small and hardy, and extremely sure-footed. They are sent to England to work in the mines, because they are so small and vigorous.

As there are no roads and no carriages in Iceland, all travelling is done on horseback, and the horses have to carry the luggage too; they can carry 200 lbs. weight for twenty-five miles a day, and that over rough tracks. The first thing a traveller has to do when he reaches Reykiavik is to buy or hire riding-horses and pack-horses; and when a party of travellers start off with perhaps twenty horses, it looks very funny, especially as they have to go single file in many places. When they come to a river, the horses have to walk or swim across, with riders or luggage on their backs.

A traveller tells us about such a scene. He saw a party of horsemen resting their horses to make them ready for the hard work of crossing the river, which was wide and deep, with many rocks in its bed. The packages of fish, wool, etc., were carefully fixed by ropes to the top of the horses' backs, so that they might not get wet. The horses were tied in a line, one behind the other. All reached the

shore in safety, though the smaller ones had to swim. A foal, fastened by the neck to the tail of the mother, was dragged through, and landed more dead than alive on the other side.

Another traveller tells how he got very fond of his little horse, which carried him so well and patiently over the rough country. He did not know the ways, and was not a very good rider, but the horse never went wrong.

There were many famous horses in the Sagas and old poems. We know the names of some: Raven, Slipper, Hawk, Lightfoot, Sheen-mane, Highfoot, Strider, and Steam. There was a couple of horses called "The Pair of Gloves," because they went so well together. There was also "Kéingala," the dun mare that Grettir had to watch; she was weather wise, and whatever food was put in the stable for the horses, "it was her way to get it all to herself."

There is a description of Gunnar's hound Sam, which was given him by his cousin, Olaf the Peacock, who said, on giving him the dog, "'I will give thee three things of price, a gold ring, and a cloak, . . . and a hound that was given me in Ireland; he is big, and no worse follower than a sturdy man. Besides, it is part of his nature that he has man's wit, and he will bay at every man whom he knows is thy foe, but never at thy

friends; he can see, too, in any man's face, whether he means thee well or ill, and he will lay down his life to be true to thee. This hound's name is Sam.'

"After that he spoke to the hound, 'Now shalt thou follow Gunnar, and do him all the service thou canst.'

"The hound went at once to Gunnar, and laid himself down at his feet."

A long time after, Gunnar's foes came against him to kill him; but first they enticed the dog away from the house and slew him, and "the hound gave such a great howl that they thought it passing strange, and he fell down dead.

"Gunnar woke up in his hall, and said, 'Thou hast been sorely treated, Sam, my fosterling, and this warning is so meant that our two deaths will not be far apart.'"

And, truly, their deaths were not "far apart," for Gunnar's foes came and killed him in his hall.

It is a sad and shameful story. Gunnar had slain two men and wounded eight, when one of them cut his bow-string asunder. Then he asked Hallgerda his wife for two locks of her beautiful long hair, that he might twist a bow-string with them; but she refused to give him that, reminding him of some old unkindness of his, when he had been angered. So Gunnar was slain, but not until he had wounded sixteen men in all, and made "a

stout and bold defence." Then one of his foes said, "We have now laid low to earth a mighty chief, and hard work it has been, and the fame of this defence of his shall last as long as men live in this land."

Then he asked Gunnar's mother, "Wilt thou grant us earth here for two of our men who are dead, that they may lie in a cairn here?"

"All the more willingly for two," she says, "because I wish with all my heart I had to grant it to all of you."

"It must be forgiven thee," he says, "to speak thus, for thou hast had a great loss."

Gunnar was buried in his cairn, and when the shepherd and the maid passed by at nights, they used to think they heard him singing in his grave.

Two of his friends were out one evening, and "the moon and the stars were shining clear and bright, but every now and then the clouds drove over them. Then all at once they thought they saw the cairn standing open, and lo! Gunnar had turned himself in the cairn and looked at the moon. They thought they saw four lights burning in the cairn, and none of them threw a shadow. They saw that Gunnar was merry, and he wore a joyful face. He sang a song so loud that it might have been heard though they had been further off."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE FALL OF THE FREE STATE.

WITH religion much else was changed in Iceland, but the greatest change of all was for the *Godar*, who were no longer priests, though they were still chiefs exactly as before. There had to be new priests throughout the land, and at first there were few Icelanders fit to be priests, because the religion was new to them, and so most of the bishops and priests came from foreign countries, — Germany, England, or Ireland. Of course, too, there was great want of law and order in the Church, as there had been at first in the State.

The “Ulfiot” of the Church was a good bishop named Gizur, who took up the work his father had begun, and laboured all his life to ensure the founding of Church rule in Iceland. He had been to foreign schools, and seems to have been well fitted for the work. He was one of those people who are born to rule, and every one had to obey him, young and old, rich and poor. The King of Norway

said there might have been three men made of him, —a king, a sea-rover, and a bishop. Others said that he was king and bishop too in Iceland. He it was who first got the bishoprics fixed at Skalaholt and Holar.

The Church laws took shape about 1122, and peace was kept between Church and State until the middle of the thirteenth century. Then the strife between the powerful men in each helped to bring about the fall of freedom.

When the Free State was first formed, the Godar were supposed to have equal power; the strength of the State depended upon this. But after some centuries one Godi would get hold of several offices instead of being content with his own. He did this in two ways, either by marrying the heiress of a rich Godi, and inheriting his office and estates when he died, or in a worse way still, by buying one or more offices. So a single Godi might become very powerful, and might even, in time, gain power over the whole island, and make himself king, and ruin the Free State.

This did not happen, however, because there was more than one Godi whose house had got rich and great, and they were always at war with one another, so that no one of them was able to rule over the others.

In the meantime some one else was thinking of



Iceland, and wished to become its king, and thus viewed with no displeasure the constant quarrels between the chiefs. This was the King of Norway, Hakon the Old.

The idea of having Iceland was no new one to the kings of Norway. So long ago as the settlement of the island, King Harold Fairhair had promised to Uni, a son of Gardar the Swede, to make him governor of Iceland, if he could bring it under the power of Norway. But Uni was killed in a quarrel, and Harold was disappointed. In Hakon's time, the Faroes, Hebrides, and Orkney Islands belonged to Norway, and he wished much to have Iceland too. He soon found an excuse. A quarrel took place between some Norwegian merchants and some Icelanders, which broke off the trade between the countries for a time, and almost caused the king to invade the island.

But one of the richest and most powerful of the chiefs, Snorri Sturlason, visited Norway about this time. When he found King Hakon getting ready to make war on Iceland, on account of the insult to his merchants, he advised the king not to go to war, but rather to make friends with the chiefs and persuade them to put the island under his protection. The king took his advice, and Snorri went home promising to help him.

At this time Snorri was head of the great house

of the Sturlungs, which had become one of the most powerful in Iceland. He was a great statesman, and was twice made speaker of the law. He was an historian, and wrote the lives of the Norwegian kings. But we remember him chiefly because he saved alive for us the stories of the old northern gods, in his book which is called *The Prose or Younger Edda*.

He returned home, but proved a poor helper to the king,—or perhaps it should rather be said that he proved truer to his country than his speeches in Norway had promised. But during the years that passed King Hakon never forgot his plan, although affairs at home in Norway made it hard for him to do more than think about it.

One of the chief reasons of King Hakon's power over the Icelanders was that many of the greatest of them were king's men at the Norwegian Court. As we have seen, it had long been the custom for young Icelanders to go abroad and stay at foreign courts, and they went most often to Norway, and sometimes stayed there all their lives. When they became king's men they promised to obey the king's orders and to come to him whenever he sent for them, and not to quit his country when he forbade it. On the other hand, they got many honours at Court, and had the king for their friend.

Snorri Sturlason was a king's man, and in the

course of a second visit to Norway he offended Hakon by breaking faith with him, as the king thought.

Another Icelfander named Gizur Thorvaldsson, one of a great family, became king's man in 1229. His house was already at feud with that of the Sturlungs, when the king commanded him either to capture Snorri (who had gone back to Iceland) and bring him to Norway, or to slay him as a traitor for his broken faith. Gizur chose the latter deed, and overpowered Snorri's household at Reykholt on the night of the 22nd September 1241, when one of his followers, Arni the Bitter, slew the great chief.

"Gizur and his company got to Reykholt at night after Saint Maurice Mass. They broke into the room Snorri was asleep in. But he jumped up and out of the room and into the little house by it. There he found Arinbiorn the priest, and spoke to him. They devised that he should go into the cellar of the house, under the loft.

"Then Gizur came on Arinbiorn the priest, and asked where Snorri was.

"Arinbiorn declared he knew not.

"Gizur said they could not make peace unless they found him. Arinbiorn said perhaps they would find him if they promised him quarter. Then they found out where he was.

"Five of them went into the cellar . . . among

them were Simon Knut and Arni the Bitter. Simon told Arni to smite him.

“ ‘Do not smite,’ said Snorri.

“ ‘Smite,’ said Simon.

“ ‘Do not smite,’ said Snorri.

“Then Arni gave him his deathblow, and Thorstein and he made an end of him.”

After his death the miserable strifes continued so constantly that there was really civil war throughout the land, and it was said that Iceland would only find peace under the rule of one man.

Hakon's attempt to destroy the power of the Sturlungs failed at this time. The quarrel between them and the house of Gizur continued for many years, and came to a terrible end in the burning of Gizur's house at Flugumyri. The story of this burning is told by a descendant of Snorri's, the historian named Sturla, in the last of the great Icelandic Sagas, the Sturlunga Saga.

It took place on October 22d, 1253. A man of the house of Gizur, named Hall, had just been married to Sturla's daughter Ingibjorg, who was a little bride, being only fourteen years old. There was a peace between the two parties, and this wedding was a pledge of it. They were keeping the wedding feast; Sturla, who wrote the tale, had just ridden away. He heard all about it afterwards from the people who were there at the time, especially Gizur.

The memory of the other night twelve years ago, when Snorri was slain, seems to have come into the minds of some of the Sturlungs, and they thought not of the peace which had been pledged by others of their house, but surrounded the house at nightfall and began a fight with the wedding party. "But when they saw that things went slowly, and were afraid the countrymen would be coming up, they set fire to the place. Ion from the Rift had brought turpentine. They took sheepskins from the frames, on which they were set out to dry, and put to them the fire and turpentine; and some took hay and thrust it into the window and fired it: and soon in the house there was a great reek and stifling smoke.

"Gizur lay down in the hall by the row of pillars on one side, and laid his nostrils and head to the floor (because when there is a fire the pure air is nearest the ground: the smoke rises and fills the upper air, and it is easier to breathe lying down on the ground), and Groa his wife lay with him. Also Thorbiorn put his nose hard by him, and he and Gizur looked each other in the face.

"Thorbiorn heard Gizur praying to God fervently and fully; he thought he had never before heard such a power of prayer.

"Gizur thought he could not keep his eyes open for the smoke. Then he got up, and Groa his wife

held him up : and then he went to the south door and he was then nearly stifled with stench and heat, and it came into his mind to make his way out rather than swelter any longer inside."

He stood at the door, and heard the men in the house talk to those outside, and he "got rather cooler the while. Then Ingibiorg, Sturla's daughter, came up to Groa at the door. She was in a single night-gown and bare-footed. She was now fourteen years old, well grown, and comely to look on. A silver belt was hanging loose about her feet, just as she got out of bed ; on it was a pouch, and in the pouch much gold which she possessed : this she had there with her.

"Groa was very fain to see her, and says, 'One end shall come upon us both together.'

"But now that Gizur had got somewhat cooler, he thought no more of rushing out ; he was in linen and coat of mail, with the broad steel helmet on his head and the sword called 'Mail-Biter' in his hand. Groa was in a single night-gown. Gizur went up to Groa and took two rings out of the purse at his breech-belt, and put them in her hand ; for he expected death for himself, but life for her. One of the rings had belonged to his uncle, Bishop Magnus, and one to his father, Thorvald.

"'I would,' he said, 'that this treasure might be enjoyed by my dear ones, if all go as I desire it.'

"Gizur saw in Groa's face that she thought this was their great parting.

"Then Gizur made his way back into the house (from the porch where the women stood) and with him Gudmund the Haughty, his kinsman, who never would leave him. They came to the door of the little room (the ladies' day-room), and Gizur thought to make his way out by it. But he heard talking and cursing outside, and soon turned back thence."

"We must leave this and turn to the next thing.

"Groa and Ingibiorg went to the door, and Groa told Ingibiorg to go out.

"Kolbein the Bearded, her kinsman (who was the leader of the foes), heard this, and told her to go out to him. She said she would never go out unless she chose a man to go with her. Kolbein said she might not do that. Groa told her to go out all the same.

"'But I want to look for the boy Thorlak, my nephew,' she says. Now the boy had leapt out first, and they heaped linen on him when he got out to the field. He was ten years old, and he got to the church (where those that escaped took shelter).

"Some have a story that one thrust Groa into the fire: and there she was found (dead) in the porch. Kolbein the Bearded jumped into the fire after Ingibiorg and took her out to the church.

"Then the house buildings began to burn

mightily. Soon after, Hall the bridegroom went out to the south door, and Arni the Bitter with him, his follower, . . . both tired, and mad with heat. A door had been set across the middle of the doorway : Hall paid no heed to it, and leapt immediately out over the board : he had a sword in his hand, but no other weapon.

“Einarr, the son of Thorgrim, was hard by when Hall leapt out, and smote at his head with his sword, and that was his death-wound. And when he fell another hewed at his right leg below the knee, and almost cut it from under him.

“Thorleif and the brewer (who had brewed the mead for the wedding feast) had gone out first, and was in the homestead there. He took one of the sheepskins and flung it under Hall when Einarr and his people left him. He pulled them both together, Hall and the sheepskin, up the path to the church, when the foes were not looking. But Hall was lightly clad, and the cold got into his wounds sorely. Thorleif was bare-foot, and got frost-bitten, and he reached them at the church later.

“Arni the Bitter leapt at once out after Hall, who struck his foot against the board, . . . he was getting an old man, . . . and fell down just where he got out.

“‘Who was that fool,’ they asked, ‘rushing head-long?’



“ ‘Arni the Bitter is here,’ says he, ‘I have no mind to beg for truce ; I see one lying near me : so that it doth not mislike me to go on even such a journey as he.’

“ Then said Kolbein the Bearded, ‘Does no one remember Snorri Sturlason now ?’

“ And they set on him and smote him many times, and he died.

“ Then the hall roof fell in, . . . and now the whole house took fire ; only the kitchen did not burn, and the little room and the dairy.

“ Now we have to tell of Gizur Thorvaldson. He reached the dairy, and his kinsman Gudmund followed him. Gizur told him to go away, and said that he could more easily escape alone by some trick, were it so fated, than two could. Then Jon the priest came up, and Gizur told both of them to go away at once. Then Gizur cast off his mail and his helmet and kept his sword in his hand.

“ Jon the priest and Gudmund went from the dairy to the south door, and both were allowed to go out.

“ Gizur went into the dairy, and he saw that a tub of sour milk stood in the dairy, by the pillar. Then he plunged his sword, Mail-Biter, into the milk, so that it sank in over the hilt.

“ Gizur saw there was a tub on the ground hard by, with sour whey in it. Now the milk-tub stood

higher, and almost covered the whey-tub on the ground. There was room for Gizur to get down into the whey-tub, and then he sat down in the whey, in a single linen robe, and the whey almost covered him. It was cold in the whey.

"He had been there a little while when he heard voices, and this is what they spoke of—'that if he were found, three men were set apart to butcher him, each was to strike his blow, and to take his time over it, to see how Gizur bore it.' Three were chosen for this. . . . And now they came into the dairy with lights, and looked all about. . . . They came to the tub Gizur was sitting in, and probed it with spears three or four times. (They could not easily see into it, as it was behind the milk-tub.)

"They disputed over it; some said they felt something, some they felt nothing. Gizur held his hands open in front of his body, moving them as softly as possible, that they might be best able to feel anything. He got scratched on the palms, and also on the knees: there were small and great wounds. Gizur has said since, that before they came into the dairy he shook so with cold that the tub gurgled, but that when they came in he shook no longer.

"Twice they looked about the dairy, and did the same thing each time. After that they went out and away.

“All the people that were left alive went on truce.”

During all these years of wretched struggles King Hakon made repeated efforts to get the land under his rule. At last, in 1262, a proposal was made at the Althing by the king, which was agreed to by most of the Icelanders, but it was not until 1264, after more long and weary struggles and disputes between the chiefs, that the news could be sent to Norway that Iceland was no longer a Free State, but was under the King of Norway.

The Icelanders made few conditions with Hakon ; they were allowed to keep their old laws. The change took place very peaceably, and no Norwegian soldiers had ever to set foot on the island.

Gizur, the man who shook for cold, but not for fear, was appointed earl over the island by King Hakon.

Many of the Icelanders were king's men, as Snorri and Gizur were, and were thus under Hakon's power, and could not escape the consequence of their promise to obey him in all things. But Hakon certainly did not behave well, and abused his authority over his men, besides tempting them by gifts and favours to be unfaithful to their country.

It will never be known whether it was best for Iceland that the Free State should fall; the story of the island afterwards was very dull for a time,

and then very sad and terrible, owing to eruptions of volcanoes, followed by plagues, and diseases, and famines. The time that the Free State lasted was the most brilliant in the story of Iceland, most fruitful in heroic deeds, and in art and literature.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FROM NORSE TO DANISH RULE.

AFTER Iceland passed under Norse rule, the loss of freedom was bad for the island; it seemed to kill its life. The only notable thing was the change of rule in 1380, when Norway having been joined to Denmark, Iceland came under Danish kings; but this did not alter things in Iceland.

Frequent volcanic eruptions, followed by plagues and cattle diseases, helped with the loss of freedom to depress the spirit of the people.

There were no new Sagas written,—what was there to make them about? But they made new copies of the old ones, and collected them in great numbers. Most of the Sagas have been handed down in copies taken at this time,—that is, in manuscripts of the fourteenth century. And of all the old Sagas, they copied the story of Burnt Nial most, and seemed never to forget it altogether; indeed it was almost like a sacred book. But after a time they ceased to care about their old Sagas,

and when they wrote new stories they were about lords and ladies who had lived in other lands, whose stories had been told already by many a sweet singer in foreign courts. These new stories were in verse, and not called Sagas, but Rimur—that is, rhymes or ballads,—but when they were made about sacred subjects they were called *Diktur*.

During the whole of the fifteenth century, trade with England alone linked Iceland with the world outside of Denmark,—there were always Danish officers in the island.

The old books and poems, and even the old life and ways, seemed to slip away very fast from the minds of the people, and they were clean forgotten.

This is “the dark age” in the story of Iceland. The Reformation, or change in the Church, took place about 1547.

A German priest named Luther had set about changing the forms and customs of the Roman Catholic faith in that part of Germany where he lived. In this way he started a change or reformation of religion which spread over the Continent, and reached Iceland and the corner of the Church there. The people began to worship God in a simpler way than before, with less of shows, and images, and fine dresses: and the new way was called “Lutheran.” This second religious change in Iceland took place more quietly even than the other,

and when the old Church went, it seemed as if the last bit of old Icelandic life had gone to join other forgotten things, and they were a different people, and not related to the heroes of the Free State, just as the England of Shakespeare's time seems a long way off from the England of to-day. They began even to speak a little differently in Iceland.

In many countries the peoples made other changes as well as that religious one—changes of thought, of manners, or of rule, and out of the new life which these changes brought came many beautiful things—poems, and books, and pictures. So that Reformation and Renaissance were said to come together; that is to say, the religion was *formed again*, and the people were *born again* to new thoughts and ways.

But the first signs of an Icelandic Renaissance are not to be noted until the end of the sixteenth century. The way in which it began was this. In a Norwegian library there were found some old Icelandic writings. A Norwegian began to translate them; the King of Denmark took an interest in the work, and asked some Icelanders to help with it, as they could read the manuscript much more easily than Norwegians.

So learning began to live again in Iceland, and it was now again closely bound up with the Church, for many of the men who began to study the old

literature of their country were bishops and priests, being better taught than other men, as a rule. They also set up schools for the teaching of young men who wished to become priests.

A little group arose who did good service to Iceland with their learning. One of these, born before the Reformation, was Lawman Odd, the son of a bishop. He was sent to stay with his uncles in Norway when he was about six years old, and he went to school there and learned Latin, German, and Danish. He began, as he grew up, to hear much about "the reformed faith," for many wise men were inclined to have it rather than the old faith. It distressed him very much that he could not make up his mind which faith to have. At last he said to himself that when every one was asleep at nights he would get out of bed in his night-shirt, and pray to God to teach him which faith was the truer, the old or the new, that he might follow that.

He did this for three nights, and then he felt a change in his heart, for he began to think only of the new faith, and to forget the old altogether. Before he sailed home to Iceland he bought some books—Latin, German, and Danish,—and amongst them was a New Testament. He became secretary to Ogmund, the last Roman Catholic bishop of Skalaholt, and lived there with him. He made himself



a desk in a cow-house, to keep his work secret from the old bishop, and he used to read and write there. It was there that he began to translate the Gospel of Matthew into Icelandic, for he said, "My Saviour Jesus was laid in an ass's stall, and now I am putting His Word into Icelandic words in a cow-house." But that was after he had finished his translation, for he told no one what he was doing. Once he fell short of paper and had to ask the bishop for some. The bishop asked him what he was writing. Odd said he was writing out the old Church laws, which was true, but in another way than the bishop understood. Then the bishop said he might have as much paper as he liked. So he finished his work. He always worked hard, and when he was not busied with other things, he spent his time in reading, writing, and translating books. He had a "great chest, big enough to hold twenty weights of butter (800 lbs.), and it was full of written books, many of which he had himself written and translated."

When he went away from Skalaholt he lived first at one place and then at another. When he finished his translation of the New Testament, he took it to Denmark, and had it printed there by the king's leave in 1540. He was made lawman a short time before his death. The third year of his lawmanship, as he was riding to the Althing, he was drowned—

his horse slipped in crossing the Laxwater. This was in 1556.

This translation of Odd's was the first New Testament given to the Icelanders in their own tongue. It was translated in beautiful simple fashion, and in doing it for them Odd had done what Luther did for Germany and Tyndale for England.

The first printing-press was brought to Iceland, three years after Odd's death, by a Swedish priest called Jon Matthewson. He set up a press, but his types (the bits of metal from which letters are printed) were half worn-out, as they had been used in Denmark before they reached Iceland. He printed a book having in it the gospels and epistles for Sundays, out of Odd's New Testament.

Some years later a bishop called Gudbrand brought a new supply of types to Iceland. He had cut many of them himself: and they were made of wood, because it was easier to cut them out, but they did not last so long as the leaden ones. Some of these were special capital letters and head-pieces for the beginnings of chapters, or ornaments for finishing them, as you see them in old printed books. He took his printing-press to Holar.

In the year 1584 he finished and printed and published a translation of the whole Bible. It had Odd's New Testament in it, and some other

books that Odd had done, but Gudbrand did the rest. It was printed beautifully and with great care by the bishop. Think what a great work he undertook and carried through. First he cut many of his types with his own hands, then he went over and corrected Odd's part of the work, and what was done afterwards by other scholars, then translated his own part, and, lastly, printed it all. It was the best Bible Iceland ever had, for although they have had new translations since, the later ones have not been done in the loving and painstaking manner of Odd and Gudbrand. For long the old Gospel-book printed from Jon Matthewson's copy was used in the churches, and at family prayers in the homes on Sundays; but now the new translation is used altogether, and the old Bibles have vanished completely.

And now we come to the figure of another learned and famous bishop—Bishop Bryniolf of Skalaholt, who was born in 1605. He was much respected in the island for his learning, and also for his rank, for he came of a great family.

Although he lived after the Reformation, when people despised the old Church, and spoke of it bitterly and with contempt, he would never say hard things of it, nor allow others to do so, because the old images and ceremonies had seemed good and holy to many, and he said he could understand

that, because he himself found it easier to pray with his eyes fixed upon a cross. He writes from his far-away home to scholars who lived on the Continent, and so got to hear what was going on among learned men in Denmark and France and Germany. He collected a large number of books and manuscripts, but his library was all scattered at his death, because his two children died before him. Now and again people come across books which belonged to him in Iceland, bearing his monogram, *U*. He gave some of his manuscripts to the King of Denmark, and they are now in the royal library at Copenhagen.

There is a story told of his coming out of the Thingvalla church, after the Althing was over, one evening. He stood amongst the boys who were playing and chattering whilst they held the horses and ponies for their fathers. One of them, the smallest boy, remembered long afterwards that the bishop seemed rather merry, and that he patted him on the head and said, "Age is upon me, and youth is upon thee; thou art very young, and I am grown too old for thee to get any good from me."

Poor Bishop Bryniolf his only daughter died when she was twenty-two, and her little son, his only grandchild, died also.

He had one son of his own, called Halldor, who did not get on well at school. So his father sent him

over to England, to see what he could do there. He fell ill when he got to England, and died before he could set out for home, as he wished, and was buried at St. Nicholas Church, Yarmouth, in October 1666.

When the bishop heard of his son's death, he sent this writing on a stone slab to be put over his grave :—

“O Earth of England,  
Guard the ashes of Halldor the Iclander.  
He is laid in pledge with thee :  
Restore him one day loyally.”

At that time most of the English people were thinking little enough about Iceland, they were busied with other matters. The year before this boy died England had declared war with Holland ; France and Denmark were resolved to help Holland. That same year the plague broke out in London.

In June and July of the year 1666 one of the greatest sea-fights whose story has ever been told took place between the foes. In September the great fire broke out in London, which lasted three days and nights, blown upon by the east wind, devouring the old-fashioned wooden houses, destroying one narrow street after another—but also destroying the plague which haunted them. In October this poor Iclander took ill and pined for home ; but the North Sea was not safe, and an English ship, whatever her errand, was likely to be

taken captive by the Dutch fleet, which had appeared at the mouth of the Thames more than once, and even sailed some way up the river. So he died, and the English people who knew him or cared for him are dead too. But English earth holds his ashes, and now that you know about him, you can remember him, and the prayer of his father, Bishop Bryniolf, that "England would give him back loyally at the last."

This bishop was said to have had most learning and most sorrow of any in his time in Iceland.

So the bishops are striking figures in Icelandic history. They were men of great learning, many of them, and often of rank and wealth. They had hard work, for visiting the homes of the people, and the churches, to hold confirmations or other special services, meant long and tedious journeys in Iceland. They had to provide priests for all the churches, and see that proper services were held. They had great weight with people, not only from their power over the souls of men, but from the power which came from their rank in the world, outside of the Church, through their wealth or wisdom. They had seats in the law-court. Many of the priests, too, were famed for their learning. One named Hallgrim Petersen was a poet, and wrote some very beautiful passion-hymns which were published in 1666.

Here are some lines from one of his hymns, in English words—

“ Up, up, my soul, my spirit wake :  
Heart be risen, and shouting make ;  
Come voice, come spirit, help record  
The agony of Christ my Lord.

Up hands and sing, raise heart and speech,  
Let gladness all thy neighbours reach.  
To grace the meal, the song of praise,  
My Lord did to His Father raise,  
And slowly, as the day grew dim,  
All the disciples sang a hymn.

The Son of God's the Lord of truth,  
Master of Heaven and Earth, in sooth,  
While He the human earth should tread,  
With all thanksgiving break His bread.

My soul, poor soul, a beggar here—  
Yet every day the Lord is near,  
Giving thee food and fostering,  
Thankfully therefore to Him sing.

What the Lord lendeth, if thou take,  
Proud-heartedly and boasting make,  
Eternity shall be thy shame.—  
God ward us ever from the same.

Thou sorrowing the path didst tread,  
With want and pain about thy head :  
I laughed and leapt the paths of sin,  
Full quittance hadst thou made therein.  
Our life is but a garden-way,  
The grave is at the end, I say.”

There was another bishop, Jon Widalin, a great preacher, whose printed sermons comforted the hearts of the people in many a cottage in Iceland long after his voice was silenced in death. We remember and revere these two men, Hallgrim and Widalin, for just as few hymn-makers are poets, so there are not many great preachers among priests and clergymen.

There is a story about another priest, of the old days before the Reformation: he was called Gudmund. "There was an old woman at Swinefell: she lay in bed at death's door, so that she had been seven nights speechless, . . . she had stirred not at all saving her forefingers and foretoes: yet had she received the holy oil and all ministrations for her departure, but her spirit would not leave her: and she was right worthy in the eyes of men. But when Gudmund the priest had got on horseback and come away from Swinefell, he began to speak—'Surely,' said he, 'I have not kissed good-bye to that blessed old woman; this must not be.'

"Then he went in and many folk with him. He came into the room where the old woman lay, and all thought her near dead. Then Gudmund the priest began to speak, and said to her, 'Be thou whole and blessed, dear old woman, now thou must go away to God. Now take my greeting to the blessed Mary the Mother of God, to Michael the Archangel, to John the Baptist, to Peter and Paul,



to King Olaf, and to a certain Ambrose, my patron, and to all the saints.'

"Then answered the old woman so as to be heard quite clearly by all outside the room. 'Ay, ay,' . . . said the old woman. That was her last word. This was near on highday, and on the same day at noon she died. It was Saturday."

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Iceland was much plagued by pirates, who came from England, from Gascony, and from that famous nest of corsairs, Algiers, on the north coast of Africa.

In the eighteenth century a dark time comes again in the story of Iceland. In 1707 the small-pox broke out and killed one-third of the people. In 1759 there was a terrible famine, followed by a sheep plague in 1762.

From time to time there were dreadful volcanic outbreaks. During that of Mount Hecla in 1765, which lasted for days, the cinders were carried as far as the Faroe Isles.

But the most frightful outbreak of any was that of Skaptar Iökull in 1783. It lasted for weeks: rivers and springs were dried up: the pasturage was blackened and scorched by cinders and poisoned by sulphur, and the cattle and sheep that ate the grass died of a horrible disease. Even the fish died in the rivers and lakes and on the coast, for the waters were poisoned like the grass.

Thus famine spread through the land, and the people died of disease and hunger. One-half of the animals perished, and one-sixth of the people.

It was in that year that the new island appeared near Iceland: the fires were active under land and sea.

So great was the misery of the people that the story of Iceland had almost finished a chapter sooner. The island took years to recover from this scourge of plague and famine, and it was actually proposed that everybody should leave the island and go to live in some other land. But they stayed in Iceland, and things got better again: new grass grew for the new sheep and cattle that were born, and new courage came into the hearts of the people.



ICELANDIC CARVED CHEST.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ICELAND NOWADAYS.

ONE of the things that helped Iceland to recover from the state of decay into which she had fallen was the visiting of the island by travellers from European countries. Many of them wrote books about themselves and their travels in Iceland. Such men were Uno von Troil, who visited the island at the end of last century and wrote *Letters upon Iceland*; Sir Joseph Banks; Sir William Hooker the botanist, in the beginning of this century; Ebenezer Henderson, who went to distribute Bibles, and wrote a journal about his travels.

Then, too, the people began to increase in numbers, and to grow richer again; and best of all, learning revived in Iceland, and Icelanders began once more to cherish their old literature and to study it.

There were also important changes of law; for in 1854 free trade was granted by the king of Denmark; that is to say, the Icelanders no

longer pay duty to the Danes upon things like flour and salt and linen, when they get them from foreign countries.

There was a long struggle for "Home Rule" in the island. The people wished to rule themselves, and make their own laws at home in Iceland, instead of having them made by Danes in Denmark. For thirty years, under the leadership of good John Sigurdsson, a learned and wise man, they pleaded with the king, in one petition after another, until at last, in 1874—the 1000th birthday of the settling of Iceland (the first, as they believe, was in 874)—the king granted them "Home Rule." He allowed the Althing (which now meets twice a year at Reykjavik) to make and carry out the laws; but he, the king, has power over the Althing, and can refuse to agree to the laws it makes, if he sees fit. There are now thirty-six members in the Althing, six of whom are chosen by the king. It is a great matter for Icelanders to have Home Rule, but they want more than that, they want to have a Free State again, as they used to have long ago. If they ever get more freedom, it will most likely be after a long and hard struggle.

But now in this last chapter it will be well to gather up shortly the chief things to be remembered in all the story of Iceland. How the Irish monks came to Iceland first of all; and then settlers

from Norway and the Western Islands, from Ireland and Scotland and other countries; the making of the Free State; the age of heroes; the change from the old faith to the faith of Christ; the making and telling of Sagas, and how they got written down in the golden age of learning; the fall of Freedom and the new rule of Norway; the change to Danish rule, and age of Saga-copying and ballad-writing; the dark age, when the old life was forgotten; the Reformation of the Church; the Renaissance of learning; then the dark time of distress and poverty, brought on by volcanic outbreaks, plagues, and famines; the gradual recovery and changes of law which bring us down to the Iceland of to-day.

Travellers tell us what the island is like now, and it has become very usual for people to visit the island and spend a holiday there. Some of the places that they go to are marked in the little map at the beginning of this book.

There is *Ingolfshofdi*, where Viking Ingolf built his "hof" before he found his house pillars and moved to Reykiavik.

Further west is *Bergthorsknoll*, the little hill with-in hearing of the sea, where Nial's hall stood before it was burned down. There is nothing left of it.

But it is at Reykiavik, the capital of Iceland, that travellers generally land. It is a little village,

with its group of timber houses, and smaller ones of turf and lava-stone, and yet it is the largest town in Iceland. The low lava hills rise up behind the houses of this small "smoky bay," and beyond are mountains whose heights are covered with snow. In summer-time the outlying prairies are green. The cathedral is here—for there is only one bishopric in Iceland now; it is like an English parish church in size, and is built of stone. There is a college at Reykiavik, and a hospital and two libraries. Here the traveller buys or hires horses and engages a guide before he goes inland or mountain-wards.

A traveller staying at Reykiavik writes: "Last night we wandered along the shore to a hot spring which rises in a small hollow about two miles from the town. We found the place and a turf dam across the burn (which rises from the spring) made by the French sailors. We plunged into the warm water and swam about. A lot of cows were browsing on the rich grass which grows in the hollow, and some of them stood close to the spring, chewing the cud thoughtfully in the steam. The setting sun threw their blue shadows on the cloud of white mist, like great long-legged ghosts of cows. It was dead calm, and very warm, and the hills and golden sea, and the purple islands floating in the bay, made a beautiful picture."

*Reykholt* is not far from Reykiavik, and there

Snorri the writer lived. There are hot springs at Reykholt, and in Snorri's time they were used for a bath which he had built; and it was so well built, that it has lasted all these years, and is still shown to travellers, and sometimes they bathe in it. It is made of hewn stones, and paved with stones, all well fitted with fine cement. It is large enough to hold thirty people. The water comes from the spring through a stone passage, and runs away by another passage.

Out of the Faxafjord opens the *Borgar fjord*, and at *Borg* near there lived Egil the poet and soldier of our king Ethelstan. There is a sad story about Egil when his son died. "Egil's dear son Bodwar was drowned; Egil found his body and put it in the grave-mound. . . . Then Egil rode home to Borg. And when he got home, he went straight to the bed-closet which it was his wont to sleep in. He lay down and shut the latch, and no one dared beg him to speak. And this is the dress Egil is said to have worn when Bodwar was buried: his hose were drawn close to his leg; he wore a red coat, laced down the side. And the story goes that his heart swelled so for grief, that the cloak and hose too burst.

"Next day Egil did not open the door of the bed-closet; he took nothing to eat or drink. There he lay for that day and the next night, and no one durst speak with him.

"But on the third day at dawn, Asgerd set a



man on a horse, and he rode with all his might west to Herdholt, and told all this news at once to Thorgerd; it was noon when he reached her; also he said that Asgerd sent her a message to come south to Borg as soon as she could.

“ . . . Thorgerd was Egil's daughter, a fair woman, and very tall, wise, and somewhat given to rule, but not a great talker.

“ At once she had a horse saddled, and two men came in her train. That evening and night they rode till they came to Borg. Thorgerd went into the kitchen, and Asgerd greeted her, and asked whether she had supped.

“ Thorgerd cried, ‘ No supper have I had, and none will I have till I sup at Freyia's. I can find no better counsel than my father's: I will not live longer than my father and brother.’

“ She went to the bed-closet and called out: ‘ Father, open the door. I will that we both go one road.’

“ Egil unloosed the latch. Thorgerd went up into the closet, and fastened the latch, and lay down in the other bed that was there. Then said Egil, ‘ Well done, my daughter, in following thy father great love hast thou shown to me. What hope was there that I should wish to live under such a blow?’

“ Then they were silent a little, and Egil said, ‘ Why, daughter, are you chewing something?’

“‘I am chewing sea-weed,’ she said, ‘because I think it makes me worse than ever, . . . else I think I should have to live long.’

“‘Is it bad for one?’ said Egil.

“‘Quite bad,’ said she. ‘Wilt eat some?’

“‘Why not?’ said he.

“A little later she called out for something to drink, and was given a horn.

“Then said Egil: ‘This is what comes of eating sea-weed, . . . it makes one all the thirstier.’

“‘Will you drink, father?’ said she.

“He took the horn and swallowed a great gulp out of it.

“Then said Thorgerd, ‘We are tricked . . . this is milk.’

“Then Egil in his anger bit a shard out of the horn, as much as his teeth could grip, and threw the horn aside.

“Then Thorgerd said, ‘What is best counsel now? This first purpose of ours is no more. Now, father, I am wishing that we should lengthen our life till thou canst make a funeral-poem on Bodwar, and I score it on a tally-stick, and after that we die, if it seem good.’ (There was no writing on parchment then; they scratched old Greek letters called ‘runes’ on sticks or bones.) ‘I trow that your son Thorstein will be slow in making a funeral-hymn on Bodwar. And it were not seemly

that he should quite lack honour; though I do not think we shall live to sit at the banquet when he receives them.'

"Egil said it was little likely he should be able to make a poem, with all his trying, 'But I may as well try this,' said he.

"Now Egil had had a son called Gunnar, and he too had died a little before, and thus he made the poem on both of them. It begins—

"'It is hard for me to lift the tongue in my mouth. I cannot hope for the spirit of poetry, nor is it easy for me to draw my song from the inmost recesses of my mind.'

"Egil got more cheery as soon as he got on with his poem; and when it was made, he recited it solemnly before Asgerd his wife, and Thorgerd, and the rest of the household. Then he rose up from his bed, and sat on the high seat. This poem was called 'The Wreck of the Sons.' And afterwards he had his sons buried under a green mound, in the old heathen fashion. And when Thorgerd went home, Egil gave her good speed with gifts."

To the south of the Breidifjord is *Helgafell*, or Holy-fell, which was one of the most sacred places in Iceland; in the heathen days there was a famous temple there. One of the settlers named Thorwolf "had so great reverence for the hill that stood on

the ness which he called Holy-fell, that he would have no man pray toward it unwashen; and it was such a great place of refuge that no living thing, man or beast, should be destroyed there, save it came away of its own will." There is another story about Helga-fell, about the old days when the dead lived inside the hill. "Thorstan, the head of his family, went out in the autumn to fish, as his wont was: and one evening his shepherd (who must have had second sight) was going after his flock on the south side of Holy-fell, and he saw the mountain open on the north side. Inside the mountain he saw great fires, and heard great sounds of glee, and gurgling of drinking horns. And as he listened if haply he might catch some clear words, he heard Thorstan and his mates welcomed, and how it was told him that he was to sit in the high seat over against his father (who was dead). . . . And next morning there came men and told them tidings that Thorstan had been drowned out fishing at sea, and men thought it a great misfortune." In Christian days there was a great monastery there.

A little further north is the Lax-river and Laxdale country, and *Herdholt*, where Thorgerd, Egil's daughter, lived.

"Upon a knoll amidst a vale it lay,  
Nigh where Lax-river meets the western sea."

This is the country where so much of the great and beautiful Laxdale Saga happened.

There is a story about the naming of one of the west fiords. "There was a man named Orlug; he was foster-son of Bishop Patrick of Sodor. He desired to go to Iceland, and asked Bishop Patrick to take care of him. The bishop brought him wood for a church, and bade him take it with him, and also a gospel book, and an iron bell, and a gold penny, and some hallowed earth; this he was to put under the corner-pillar of the church, and so consecrate it. Then said Bishop Patrick, 'No matter where thou landest, settle only in that place where three mountains are to be seen from the sea, and a firth to be seen between each pair of mountains, and a dale by the side of each mountain. Sail to the mountain which is furthest south; a wood should be there: and going from the south under the mountain thou shalt light on a clearing, and three stones piled or built up. Build there a church and settle.'

"Orlug put to sea, and in another ship went his foster-brother Koll: they sailed together. With Orlug in his ship was a man called Thorbiorn Sparrow, and another called Thorbiorn Gills, and another called Thorbiorn Gull. But when they came where they might hope to see land, a great storm rose on them and drove them all round Iceland.

“Then Orlug called on Bishop Patrick, his foster-father, and vowed that wherever he should land he would name the place after him. They went on a little space ere they sighted land. Orlug came in his ship to Orlug’s haven—and therefore called the firth ‘Patrick’s Fiord.’

“But Koll called upon Thor. Then there was a break in the storm, and he came to the place now called Koll’s Creek, and his ship was wrecked there. Here they stayed the winter out. Some of his mates settled there. In spring Orlug put to sea, and sailed away with all that was his. And when he came south before Faxa-mouth, he saw the fells that he had been told of. Then the iron bell fell overboard and sank. And they sailed along the firth, and landed at the place called Sand Creek. And there, on a heap of sea-weed, lay the iron bell. He settled there by the advice of his kinsman Helgi.”

To the north-west is *Thingeyre*, where there used to be a monastery, which is now swept away; some of the monks who lived there wrote good books.

To the north, in the beautiful Skaga-fiord, lies the little island of Drangey, where Grettir the Strong, the outlaw, passed his last days. He went there with his younger brother Illugi, who would not leave him, for said he, “‘I will go with thee,

brother, though I know not that I shall be of any help to thee, unless it be that I shall ever be true to thee, nor run from thee whiles thou canst stand, and moreover I shall know more surely how thou farest if I am still in thy fellowship.'

"Grettir answered, 'Such a man thou art, that I am gladder in thee than in any other; and if it cross not my mother's mind, fain were I that thou shouldst fare with me.'"

So they went together; and Illugi was fifteen years old, and the goodliest to look on of all men. They had a slave with them, but he was the greatest of tomfools; he had a by-name, and was called "Noise."

They rowed out to Drangey island by moonlight. "It is but a little way from Reeks out to the island, one sea mile only. So when they came to the isle, Grettir deemed it good to behold, because it was grass-grown, and rose up sheer from the sea, so that no man might come up thereon save there where the ladders were let down; and if the uppermost ladder were drawn up, it was no man's deed to get upon the island. There also were the cliffs full of fowl in the summer-tide, and there were eighty sheep upon the island, which the bonders (farmers) owned, and they were mostly rams and ewes, which they had a mind to slaughter. There Grettir set himself down in peace.

“As time wore on to winter-tide, the farmers went in a great barge to fetch their fat beasts for slaughter. But when they came to the island, they found the ladders drawn up, and found that Grettir had taken possession of the island. They begged him to let them have their sheep, and said he might keep those he had slaughtered. ‘A good offer,’ said Grettir, ‘but this time let each keep what he has got; and I tell you, once for all, that hence I go not, till I am dragged away dead; for it is not my way to let that go loose which I have once laid hand on.’

“Thereat the farmers held their peace, and deemed that a woful guest had come to Drangey: then they gave him choice of many things, both moneys and fair words, but Grettir said nay to one and all, and they gat them gone with things in such a stead, and were ill-content with their fate, and told the men of the country-side what a wolf had got on to the island.”

But the woful guest stayed at Drangey. At last, however, Grettir was laid up of a bad cut on the leg he had given himself with an axe, and Illugi nursed him, while Noise was set to keep watch without. But one day he fell asleep on his watch, and left the ladders down, and Grettir’s foes got up on to the island. They found Noise asleep, and cried, “Wake up, beast! Certes, in evil stead is he who



trusts his life to thy faith and troth." And they gave him a good beating.

Then they went to the hut and fell upon Grettir, who fought like a hero, though he was "utterly unmeet for fight, both for his wound's sake, and for his sickness." Illugi "made defence for both in most manly wise," for Grettir cried to him, "*Bare is the back of the brotherless.*" And at length they slew Grettir, but got small fame by it, for he was weak and sick. But as for Illugi, they took him prisoner; and when he refused to promise not to avenge his brother's death, they put him to death in cold blood. That is the story of Drangey Island in the Skagafjord.

One of the most sheltered places in Iceland is the little northern fishing-village of *Akureyri*, where there is now a school. Here two or three mountain ashes grew to a height of from twenty-five to thirty feet. There is a better harbour at *Akureyri* than there is at the capital, *Reykjavik*. Small fishing-boats go out from it every summer towards *Greenland*; the boats are anchored amongst the ice, or in deep water, and shark-fishing begins. The hide of these fish is made into shoes and shagreen, and their livers into oil; their fins are dried and eaten as dainties.

The villages in Iceland are far apart, and generally consist of a tiny church, with its lonely churchyard, the pastor's house, and perhaps a farm

and one or two cottages. The cottages have roofs of fresh green turf, and people have been known to ride over them at nights, mistaking the cottage for a hillock. Here is a description of the Thingvalla church. The walls are of lava-stone and turf, the roof of growing turf, the door of unpainted fir-planks. The whole length of it is but twenty-three, and the height about six feet. The altar is a little wooden table, with two brass candlesticks upon it. There are chests and benches for the people to sit upon. There are two small glass windows, and two bells to ring the people to service on Sundays. Inside the chests Bibles are kept, and clothes, and all kinds of things. The churches are used as store-houses, and sometimes fagots of firewood are piled up inside them. Travellers are sent there to sleep at nights, if it is too wet to pitch their tents, or if there is no room for them in the farm or cottages near; and one tells us that "the church proved a store or lumber-room—clothes hung to the seats, milk stood to cream, and salt barrels cumbered the floor."

A traveller, writing in 1809, says that he saw in a church the coffin of the minister, lying all ready, made with his own hands because he was getting old.

The people come on horseback to church on Sundays from very far off. The women still wear the fine old dress, though the men in many places have given it up. It is a tall curved head-

dress, and woollen petticoat and bodice; and sometimes they wear gold and silver chains.

There is a joyful meeting in the churchyard on Sundays, amongst the nameless graves, few of which are marked by stone or timber, but only by their friends' loving remembrance. Men and women and children greet one another, and chatter outside the church door, and if any one has been long away through illness, or any other reason, all his friends welcome him when he comes with a kiss. Then the pastor comes up and is greeted, and all follow him into church.

The Icelanders are a very hospitable people, and will take much trouble to set a traveller on the right way, or help him when he needs it.

One traveller tells how his party came at nine o'clock to the door of a worthy priest, "whom we found seated in the fish-house nursing his baby, and at the same time making ready his Sunday sermon. A man who was busied in storing some fish and wool in the same building offered to go with us part of our way, and the priest at once sent him in search of his horse, which was grazing in the morass." And whilst the man searched for the horse in the rain and the fog for nearly three hours, the priest gave his uninvited guests food and shelter.

This is only one of many like tales, telling of kindness and generosity, while there are few telling of rudeness or meanness shown towards strangers.

And we must remember that all travellers do not behave with that good feeling and breeding which merit hospitality in return.

The pastors, like their people, are often very poor, and have to manage their farm and household through the week, as well as preach on Sundays. They dig peat, and cut and make hay, and are generally the best blacksmiths in the island. The richest man in Iceland has only £300 a year ; but then the Icelanders say, "It is our poverty that makes strong our 'happiness.'"

So pastor Jon Thorlakson, a poet of late times, who translated Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Icelandic, said, "Ever since I came into this world, I have been wedded to Poverty, who has now hugged me to her bosom these seventy winters all but two : and whether we shall ever be separated here below is known only to Him that joined us together."

But though they are poor, they are proud, and there is no word for "beggar" in Icelandic. There was a workhouse built at Reykiavik, but no one ever came to live in it, because the poor people are taken to live with their richer neighbours. So the governor himself went into the workhouse, and made it his private dwelling. This fostering of the poor has been kept up ever since the time of the Free State. There used to be fasts three times in the year, and the food saved then was given to the poor. If a man hunted or fished on a Sun-

day, in old days, he had to give a fifth part of his gains to the poor. Travellers in the early part of this century tell of many pretty and old-fashioned customs which they saw in Iceland. One of them was this: after the master of the house had said grace before a meal, his guests turned to him and said: "Gif mir mat med Gud's fridi" (Give me meat with God's peace); and as soon as they had finished the meal they kissed the master and mistress, and thanked them for their kindness.

Sometimes the mistress herself waits upon her guests.

The old custom of reading aloud, or reciting some part of an old history or of the Bible, is still kept up in some houses, and the family and servants gather in the large room of a winter evening, just as in old times.

In summer-time the cattle and sheep are driven to the hills to find pasture for themselves. The shepherds drive them into the folds twice a day, where the milking-maids are waiting for them. The fold has four turf walls, and whilst the girls milk the sheep, the shepherd may often be seen lying lazily along the top of the wall, watching them and talking. The cattle come home to the farms in winter, if there is enough of food for them, but sometimes they are left to shift for themselves; horses may be seen eating the sea-weed on the shore.

The women make curds and butter and cheese in

summer, and the men are busy with the hay-harvest. If there is much hay to be cut, fishermen are hired from the coast-places, and are given so many pounds of butter for a day's work. About the middle of summer the people go out to gather the Iceland moss, which grows on the hillsides. This is used for food ; it is steeped in cold water to rid it of the bitter taste, and then boiled in milk, when it turns into a jelly. It is also sent to other countries, where it is used for medicine. The people go out in companies to gather it, and live in tents at nights. And they always take the children with them.

There is a fair once a year, in June, at Reykiavik, and the peasants ride there to sell their goods at market. They take sheep's wool and fox-skins, and knitted stockings and mittens, eider down and feathers, fish oil and whale blubber, and the Iceland moss : they exchange these things for rye and bread and biscuits, flour and salt, linen and cotton, and soap and brandy, which are brought by merchants from other countries. Of late years merchants go to Iceland to buy sheep and ponies, and these ponies are bought, too, for English mines.

Some Icelanders are beginning to leave Iceland and go to other countries to begin life anew. It is a strange life for an Icelander, who has "never seen a tree, a road, or a plough," to live in America, but it will be a good thing for Iceland if some of her people are happy and well-to-do in other lands.

The deep-sea fisheries round Iceland are chiefly worked by sailors from other countries—Norwegians, Danes, Scots, and Frenchmen. Strangers may not fish within a league of the coast. The Norwegian sailors discovered a herring fishery off the coast some years ago, which will be a new source of wealth to Iceland.

The French fishing-boats start for Iceland in February. It is not an easy life by any means; for the boats are small and crowded, and the work is hard. The wages depend upon the amount of fish that is carried back. The fish is kept sweet in salt, and the voyage lasts as long as the salt holds out which they bring with them from home.

The Icelandic coast is a dangerous one in a storm. The captain of one of these boats has many duties; he is cook, and doctor, and gives out the food and drink, as well as ordering everything. In the summer months the boats meet in one of the fiords, and the needful mending is done before the voyage home. The sailors sometimes bring cocks with them in baskets, to tell them the time in the morning, for the birds crow at the time of French dawn from mere force of habit, even though it is light all night long.

These Breton sailors have a little prayer which they say before starting on a voyage: "My God, take care of me: my boat is so little, and Thy sea so big."

Here are some lines from an Icelandic child's hymn, to be sung in the evening :—

“The night is nigh, the sun is set, the dew's begun to fall,  
And home are come to our farm-yard, cows, shepherd, sheep,  
and all.

The evening sun is setting fast, behind the northern height,  
The precious day is well-nigh past : God keep us all to-night !

The evening sun is setting fast, behind the northern hill,  
The precious day is well-nigh past : God teach us all His will !

The evening sun is setting fast, behind the northern crest,  
The precious day is well-nigh past : God keep the wind at rest !

The evening sun is setting fast : God send us peace alway :  
And when this day is done and past, give us another day !”

It may be that some of you children who read this story of Iceland may wish to know more of it. Some of you may go there some day, and see the places and people for yourselves ; but there is yet another way of getting to know more about Iceland, and that is by reading the history and poetry books, from which the stories about Nial, and Gunnar, and Grettir, and Egil, are taken. As you grow older you can read those of them that have been given us in English, but afterwards, and much better, you can learn to read them in the Icelandic tongue itself, which is not hard to learn to read, and so get close to the very living spirit that has made the story of our kinsfolk in Iceland worth telling and hearing.



# DATES.

## ICELAND.

### HISTORY.

### LITERATURE.

## ENGLAND AND NORWAY.

### THE AGE OF HEROES. 900-1030.

- 900-930. Settling of Iceland.  
 950. Althing founded.  
 980. Finding of Greenland.  
 1000. Change of Faith.
- c. 980. Nial born.  
 c. 970. Egil the poet composes the poem on his son's death.

### SAGA MAKING AND WRITING. 1030-1400.

- Civil Wars.  
 Rise and fall of Great Houses.
- 1030-1100. Sagas composed.  
 1067-1148. Ari the historian.
- 1178-1241. Snorri Sturlason.  
 1215-1284. Sturla. Collecting foreign romances. Copying Sagas, Histories, and Laws.
1271. Acceptance of Norse Rule. Eruptions of volcanoes. Diseases and Plagues.  
 1380. Change to Danish Rule.
871. Alfred the Great.  
 Harold Fairhair.
1001. Anlaf Tryggwason's fall.
1016. Canute the Dane.  
 Anlaf the Saint.
1066. William the Conqueror.  
 1086. Doomsday Book.  
 1096. First Crusade.
1265. Simon of Montfort's fall.  
 1324. John Wiclif born.  
 1328. Chaucer born.  
 1380. Wiclif's translation of the Bible finished.

### THE DARK AGE. 1400-1590.

English trade the only link with Europe. Rimes only composed.

### THE REFORMATION. 1590-1630.

#### Ravages of Pirates.

1540. Odd's New Testament printed abroad.  
 1559. Jon Matthewson's printing-press set up.  
 1575. Bishop Gudbrand's press set up.  
 1684. Gudbrand's Bible printed.  
 1605. Bishop Brynolf born.
1558. Elizabeth ascended the throne.  
 1564. William Shakespeare born.  
 1599. Oliver Cromwell born.  
 1608. John Milton born.

RENAISSANCE. 1680-1700.	
First Antiquaries. 1666. Hallgrim's Hymns published. Icelandic Scholars abroad.	1665. Great Plague in London. 1666. Great Fire in London. 1702. Queen Anne.
AGE OF MISFORTUNE. 1700-1800.	
1707. Small-pox.	1709. Samuel Johnson born.
1759. Famine. 1762. Sheep plague. 1765. Eruption of volcanoes.	1770. Wordsworth born.
1783. Great eruption of volcanoes.	
RECOVERY. 1800.	
European Travellers.	
1816. Founding of Icelandic Literary Society, by Rask, translations from foreign tongues. 1744-1819. Jon Thordarson, translator of Milton. 1791-1852. Swinblom Egilsson, translator of Odyssey.	1815. Battle of Waterloo.  1837. Queen Victoria.
1854. Free Trade. 1874. Home Rule. New constitution, the result of John Sigurdsson's advocacy.	
Emigration to America.	1869-1875. Icelandic-English Dictionary.



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For "Anda," pp. 91, 92, read "Auda."

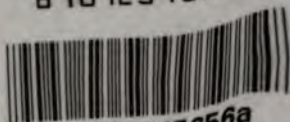




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